



Thursday, March 23, 2017

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Woman faces prison after fleecing dementia sufferer

CLEANER STOLE FROM BLIND MAN

BY JOHN SCOTT

A CROOKED cleaner who fleeced a 93-year-old blind man out of up to £250,000 in less than two years is facing a lengthy jail sentence.

Veronica Robinson, from Halesowen, who started work at the man's Black Country home in August 2013, isolated the wealthy dementia-sufferer from friends and family so she could take control of his money.

The scheming 61-year-old spent £188,000 of his savings buying a house for herself while a further £67,000 remains unaccounted for after being withdrawn in cash from his bank accounts over the 19 months she was employed by him.

A jury at Wolverhampton Crown Court on Tuesday unanimously found Robinson guilty of fraud by abuse of position and of perverting the course of justice. She was remanded in custody to be sentenced on April 21.

Judge Barry Berlin told her: "This is a very serious matter, a grave matter, for which there will be an immediate custodial sentence of some length."

Robinson's partner Robert Homer, a 66-year-old security firm boss from High Haden Road, Cradley Heath, was acquitted after being found not guilty of aiding and abetting fraud and false representation.

Controlling

Chris King, principal Dudley Trading Standards officer, who led the investigation into Robinson, afterwards said: "She engineered her way into a position of trust and was effectively controlling the victim's life. She then abused that position by getting as much money out of him as she could."

Robinson blocked phone calls to relatives and spread lies about neighbours, fracturing friendship with those who had supported him since the death of his second wife in 2005. The locks on the property were changed.

Twice married mother-of-two Robinson took him on trips to the bank, as withdrawals from his accounts soared from £1,000 to almost £6,000-a-month with her writing cheques for him to sign. She used some of the money to buy a house in Beecher Street, Halesowen.

• Callous conwoman – see page 4



DREAM DRAMS FOR THE WHISKY CONNOISSEURS



Adrian Lilly offers a sample of one of the whiskies he had available at the Midlands Whisky Festival held in Stourbridge Town Hall

WHISKY connoisseurs were in fine spirits as they turned out in their droves at the Midlands Whisky Festival, held in Stourbridge.

Nearly 40 exhibitors offered hundreds of tipplers with choices of whisky from not just Scotland and Ireland but also from the USA, India, Japan and Sweden, all finding their way to Stourbridge Town Hall.

The event was organised by wine merchants Nickolls and Perks, who have been

based in Stourbridge since 1797, and they described the festival as their biggest event to date.

The festival has gone from strength to strength from its beginnings as a more low key annual event six years ago, to it's two day sell-out success last weekend.

It has become so popular that they will be holding a follow up festival in Birmingham in September.

Tim Robbins, marketing and events manager from Nickolls and Perks, said: "We had over 700 visitors on Friday and Saturday, it was rammed and we've had fabulous feedback so far."

There were also 'masterclasses' featuring A Taste of Diageo's 2016 Special Releases with Colin Dunn and 240 Years of Glenfarclas with George S. Grant, a sixth generation member of a famous whiskey family.

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CRIME

Police swoop over charity shop raids

DOZENS of police officers launched early-morning raids on a suspected gang of thieves that has targeted charity shops and firms around the region in burglaries totaling £500,000.

Officers used battering rams on Monday to enter properties to arrest suspects on suspicion of conspiracy to burgle after shops and factories were hit in Dudley, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Staffordshire.

Six addresses were raided as part of the police fightback against the gang, linked to 67 burglaries. Five men were arrested.

INVESTMENT

New hotel is set to create 20 jobs

TRAVELODGE has announced it will be opening 15 new hotels this year – including its second in Dudley.

The 78-room Birmingham Dudley Tipton Travelodge will open later this year at Discovery Way on Tipton Road.

A spokesman said: "The new purpose built hotel represents an investment of £6 million and will create 20 jobs within the community."

The chain's other hotel in the borough is the Dudley Travelodge in Brierley Hill.

RETAIL

Empty shops on the decrease in borough

THE rate of empty shops in Dudley has dropped, new figures have revealed.

The Local Data Company has released a report on retail vacancy rates in the UK's 650 town centres.

In Dudley, 17.7 per cent of the borough's 356 stores were empty in 2016. This improved from 20.1 per cent recorded in the first half of 2016.

In the West Midlands, Walsall was worst with 22.8 per cent of shops empty. In West Bromwich 22.2 per cent of stores were vacant. However, Halesowen only has a 6.4 per cent vacancy rate.

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MEET THE COMEBACK KID



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Shed fraudster is facing prison term



Steven Corbett - convicted

A FRAUDSTER took thousands of pounds for garden sheds he failed to supply if facing a probable jail sentence.

Steven Corbett, of Tack Farm Road, Stourbridge, made the bogus sales via online site eBay, taking money from customers upfront. Individual payments were as large as £2,090 and it is thought he received more than £22,500 from the scam.

Trading standards officers were alerted to the 37-year-old's racket after complaints were made.

Corbett pleaded guilty to ten counts of fraud by false representation, where the loss totalled £8,300, at Wolverhampton Magistrates' Court on Thursday. He was committed to the city's crown court for sentence and told by magistrates he could face a lengthy period behind bars.

Mr David Elliott, prosecuting, said trading standards believed there had been 25 customers conned by Corbett. In July officers visited his business, Pine Sheds, at The Factory Centre, Woods Lane, Cradley Heath.

His answers to inquiries at that stage convinced trading standards it was merely a failing business. He said he was no longer taking orders and was working to fulfil those outstanding. But by September the number of complainants had increased from four to 22. There was a further visit to the premises and the site manager told officers Corbett had not been seen there for two months.

Corbett was granted unconditional bail to appear at Wolverhampton Crown Court on April 18.

Police selling criminals' valuables for thousands

VALUABLE Watches seized from crooks and sold at a Dudley auction house have sold for a total of more than £30,000.

Rolex, Cartier and Breitling wristwatches seized under the Proceeds of Crime Act and Police Property Act have fetched thousands at the West Midlands Police auctions at Aston's over recent years.

Chris Aston, of the Tower Street-based auctioneers, said: "These West Midlands Police auctions are the most exciting auctions we hold with the biggest variety of items on offer. They certainly make a change from the traditional antique auctions."

"The best part for both ourselves and the bidders is the fact that all of the items are sold 'without reserve' so items start off very low, attracting plenty of bids."

The money made from the sales goes into the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioners' £1 million Active Citizens Fund, which supports good causes around the region.

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, David Jamieson said: "These tainted trinkets are the result of people's suffering criminals preyed on victims to earn their dirty money."

"This auction sends a strong message that crime doesn't pay and justice catches up with criminals in the end."

Among the star sellers have been a Rolex Oyster Perpetual Captain-Master, which sold for £8,640, a Rolex Submariner worth over £6,000 and a heavy 9ct belcher link chain at £2,300.

iPads stolen in a raid on school

A SCHOOL was broken into and had 29 iPads stolen. Police are appealing for information after Olive Hill Primary School, in Springfield Road, Halesowen, was targeted by raiders.

A statement issued in the school newsletter reads: "The school is fully insured, however, this is unlikely to cover the full cost of replacing the devices. Unfortunately, the money we will need to spend to replace the devices can not now be spent on other resources for the children."

A West Midlands Police spokesperson said: "Police were called to reports of a burglary at Olive Hill School between 2.25 and 2.55am on Friday, March 10. A number of iPads were stolen. Anyone with information is asked to call police on 101."

Coach company has sets up new base

A COACH firm has relocated its Black Country company HQ to new premises in Dudley.

Dunwood Travel, a coach tour operator specialising in holidays for the over-50s, has now moved to a new site at Pear Tree Lane, Dudley.

Schoolboy rock star returns to classroom

By Judith Hawkins

SCHOOLBOY Harry Egerton was given a true rock-star reception by his classmates when he returned to school after a stint on the West End stage.

Twelve-year-old Harry Egerton has just returned to his Halesowen home after six months living in London with fellow cast members in Andrew Lloyd Webber's School of Rock The Musical.

Now Harry is back focusing on his schoolwork at The Earls High School, but found time to show off his newfound skills in the classroom. Mother Julie praised the school for their support, and for ensuring he was able to keep up with his classmates by sending work via a dedicated tutor at the 'School of Rock' house.

Harry is still reeling from the life-changing role, which has cemented his desire for a lifelong acting career.

He said: "It is the best feeling, and to get that every single night. I know I want to keep on doing this for the rest of my life. It has been unbelievable, getting to perform every single day. And to get to live with the people you are performing with. That has been one of the most fun things."

Harry admits he has enjoyed 'rocking out' and is a keen musician himself having played the keyboard since he was five.

ELO

Ahead of securing the West End role as a roade in the musical, Harry's talents were developed by teacher James Gullick from Dudley Performing Arts and the late Chris Groucutt, son of ELO's Kelly Groucutt, who helped Harry with his guitar playing.

Julie added: "I'm really proud. It was hard him being away from home in London, but it was such a big opportunity and he really enjoyed it."

It is not Harry's first time in the lime-light. He had a part in Footloose The Musical at The New Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham, appeared in CBBC's All Over The Workplace and in the world's biggest panto, at The Barclaycard Arena with Paul O'Grady.



Harry Egerton, age 12, is back with classmates at Earls High after appearing in hit West End musical School of Rock



Harry, bottom left, with the school's West End cast

Jack Black in the movie version of School of Rock

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Homes for elderly due at former landfill site

DOZENS of homes for the elderly are set to be built on a disused landfill site in Rowley Regis.

The land off Moor Lane could be used for a mixture of 60 one-bedroom flats and 30 two-bedroom flats with communal facilities for adult social care.

The Sandwell Council scheme was due to be discussed this week.

A report on the plans states: "The site was historically used for landfill purposes and this proposal would result in it being brought back into beneficial use and provide the opportunity to improve the remaining open space."

"The development of an extra care scheme will provide support for older people."

Design proposals are currently being drawn up. The site, which is near Rowley Regis Hospital, has in the past been occupied by travelling circuses and fairgrounds, but fears over travellers setting up camp on the land has been raised.

Council leader, Steve Eling, said: "It is part of our extra care scheme, a number of which we have in Sandwell. It is for elderly people who need a lot of care but would rather be in their own flat with care facilities rather than in a care home. The scheme is one of the real successes in Sandwell's care services."

The authority recently approved a 4.99 per cent council tax rise, which includes three per cent to fund social care. It will mean households paying around £1 a week extra from April.

Libraries offering map print service

MAPS can now be printed at libraries in Dudley borough.

Dudley Council has introduced the service to make it easier for people to produce the correct documentation when submitting planning applications.

The service will be available during regular opening hours at Dudley Library, Halesowen Library, Stourbridge Library and The Archives Local History Centre on Tipton Road.

Prices start at £9 for A4 or £20 for A3, which includes six printed copies. It can also be emailed or printed at home.

Councillor Rachel Harris said: "It is part of our continued drive to adapt the services we offer at our libraries in response to public demand."

Having a laugh on Red Nose Day

LAUGHTER Yoga sessions will be held at Dudley Leisure Centre to raise funds for Comic Relief during Red Nose Day tomorrow (Friday), with 45-minute sessions at noon and 1pm at the Wellington Road venue.

Romanian jewel thieves put behind bars



Vasile Cardos - jailed

A MAN from Rowley Regis has been jailed for more than eight years for his role in Romanian criminal gang which bagged £3 million in jewellery shop raids across the country.

In 14 months the gang - believed to have been trained at a 'Romanian Crime Academy' - hit 11 stores. The used strategies including cordoning off roads with industrial cables to reduce witnesses, cycling to crime scenes and even starting fires to distract emergency services. They would base themselves in tents two to three miles away from the scenes of the crimes and even buried their waste to eliminate clues.

Among the gang was Vasile Daniel Cardos, aged 26, from Halesowen Street in Rowley Regis, who has been sentenced to eight years and two months behind bars for conspiracy to commit burglaries.

Four others, of no fixed address, were handed the same punishment - Bogdan Costel Neagu, aged 24, Ioan Bucuresteanu, 24, Silviu Ioan Acatrinei, 20, and Andrei Florin Tifui, 28.

Meanwhile, Ioachim Karp, 19, of no fixed address, was sentenced to six years and six months for aggravated burglary and conspiracy. A further man is due to be sentenced on March 28.

Detective Chief Inspector Ricky Fields, from Staffordshire Police, said: "We're dealing with a group of individuals who are extremely organised and forensically aware. They went to great lengths in an attempt to avoid detection."

"The group could be linked to the 'crime academy' in Romania as several of the members came from the same region. The crime academy provides a strict code for its members as well as training in numerous techniques."

The gang targeted Beaverbrooks, Fraser Hart and Goldsmiths chains as well as independent traders.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Free 'bond with your bump' class

A FREE activity session encouraging pregnant mums to 'bond with their bumps' is being held Dudley Library tomorrow (Friday).

Parents-to-be have been invited to 'Bump, Baby and Beyond' from 11am to 2pm.

The event aims to help mums communicate with their imminent new arrivals through the medium of talking, rhyming and reading.

Charities, businesses and organisations will also showcase their services. The session is free and there is no need to book for the event.

Actors' first steps into the limelight

YOUNG actors from a Stourbridge-based drama group will be making stage debuts next month.

Twenty members of Dramaworkshop, founded and directed by professional actress Esther Stanford, will take centre stage at Netherton Arts Centre on April 2 in productions of The Mobile Phone Show and Blood Brothers.

It will be the first acting experience in front of a live audience for some of the cast.

Tickets can be bought from www.ticketsource.co.uk or on 07588 454083.

Posh frocks night in aid of hospice

NEW and nearly new wedding and prom dresses will be sold to raise money for Mary Stevens Hospice.

The charity regularly receives donations from boutiques and shops that are clearing stock.

Now the dresses and other items will be sold to raise money for the charity at Cradley Heath Liberal Club on Upper High Street from 5pm on Tuesday.

Designer dresses and outfits will start from £25.

Ladies Day comedy is society's latest play

DETAILS for a drama society's next show have been announced.

Enville Street Dramatic Society's production of Amanda Whittington's comedy Ladies Day will be held at Amblecote Holy Trinity Church Hall from April 5 to 8. For tickets to the show, call 01384 376342 or 07857543846.

The society was founded in 1947 as the social arm of Enville Street Methodist Church in Stourbridge, and have staged more than 130 plays. Visit www.envillestreetdramatic.org.uk

Man injured in crash

A MAN was seriously injured when a car hit a telegraph pole in Dudley at 5am on Sunday. Another three people suffered minor injuries in the accident involving a black Fiesta in Halesowen Road. The road remained closed until around noon and police ask anyone with information to call 101.

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Crooked 'cleaner' who tricked war veteran didn't even clean

CASH hungry cleaner Veronica Robinson was suspected of both conning money out of a local authority and duping a famous charity before fleecing an elderly dementia sufferer in his 90s of around £250,000.

The 61-year-old returned to the UK in late 2011 after spending 37 years in Australia during which she had two short lived marriages, gave birth to two children and launched a business.

Once back in this country she pocketed hundreds of pounds of housing benefit for her rented home from Sandwell Council. She was not entitled to a penny of it. She kept secret up to £54,000 of savings – possibly compensation for a fall when living in Australia – which invalidated the claim.

Hidden

The payments were halted in December 2013 after officials discovered her hidden wealth, shortly after she started her cleaning job at the Black Country home of the elderly blind man who she was to fleece over 19 months.

Double dealing Robinson then registered as a collector for Help for Heroes twice in less than a week, apparently using different names, dates of birth and addresses.

She signed on to raise money in her own name in April 2014. Five days later she appears to have registered again, this time using the surname of a relative.

The alarm was raised after documents linking her with the charity in both names were found following her



Robinson takes her victim, whose face has been obscured, to the bank

arrest on March 27, 2015. It is unclear what, if any, donations were directly forwarded to the charity through her collections.

Help for Heroes declined to discuss the matter when asked for comment.

Robinson's dealings with the charity and Sandwell Council did not result in criminal proceedings and were not mentioned to the Wolverhampton Crown Court jury that convicted her of fraud by abuse of position.

The case centred on her determination to milk the registered blind

victim of as much money as possible after deliberately isolating him from friends and family, allowing her to take control of his finances on trips to the bank.

Experts later said the dementia-sufferer had 'lacked capacity' to make rational financial decisions. But they had to wait for four months before being able to assess him, allowing her to argue that he had been much better when she had taken control of his finances.

Robinson callously cancelled GP



Robinson outside court

appointments and blocked four attempts to check his condition between December 2014 and March 2015, when he was finally seen with police assistance after concern had grown over the amount of cash being withdrawn on visits to the bank with her.

She was arrested the day after the assessment and released on bail on condition she had no contact with the man.

This was lifted a month later when police handed over the inquiry to

Dudley Trading Standards Department, who do not have power to bail people, and she immediately started seeing the victim again.

The elderly man's son was aware of £2,400 hidden in the old man's wardrobe. Days later that had gone and shortly afterwards police were called when Robinson took the dementia-sufferer to the bank in a bid to withdraw a further £1,000.

His anxious son and step-son, who both live abroad, went to the Court of Protection which looks after the interests of people with limited mental capacity. The family put a cap on the amount of cash he could take from his accounts and the sons were officially put in control of his finances in July 2015, a ruling desperate Robinson unsuccessfully tried to overturn. The following February Robinson was forced to give the family the Beecher Street house she had bought with his money.

Her victim, who knew Robinson by her middle name of Sue, is now 96, suffering from Alzheimer's disease and living in a care home near Wolverhampton.

A Second World War veteran awarded an MBE for services to industry, his friends described him as proud and stubborn. He bought Robinson a £1,000 brooch, the £188,000 house and gave her a £10,000 'loan' as around £250,000 disappeared from his savings.

Chris King, who led the Dudley Trading Standards investigation, said of Robinson: "She put a lot of thought into trying to justify her actions and showed no remorse."

Shocked by the state of the victim's home, it was clear to visitors that the cleaner didn't even do any actual cleaning.

Memorial to victims of terror attack

A MEMORIAL to the victims of the Tunisia terror attacks – including three members of the same Black Country family – will be constructed in a West Midlands park.

Cannon Hill Park in Birmingham has been chosen as the location for the monument which will pay tribute to those killed in Sousse and Tunis in 2015.

The place of 'remembrance, commemoration and reflection' is due to open next year.

Joel Richards, aged 19, his uncle Adrian Evans, 44, and grandfather Pat Evans, 78, were among those who lost their lives during terrorist Seifeddine Rezgui's rampage at the Riu Imperial Marhaba hotel in Sousse on June 26, 2015.

Joel's younger brother Owen, just 16 at the time, survived the attack.

Others killed included former Birmingham City FC player Dennis Thwaites, 70, and his wife Elaine, 69, and Sue Davey, 44, who grew up in West Bromwich.

The attack followed a previous assault on Bardo National Museum in the capital city of Tunis on March 18, 2015, which claimed the life of Sally Adey from Shifnal.

Governors sought by hospital trust

BIRMINGHAM Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust is looking for two governors from the Black Country. Nominations are open to anyone over the age of 16 who has an interest in Birmingham Children's Hospital and Birmingham Women's Hospital. They will have a say in key trust decisions and in representing the views of the people from the Black Country. Closing date is April 19. Call 0121 333 8433.

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Norovirus cases up after gel budget cut

A BLACK Country hospital saved almost £10,000 from its hand gel budget, while the number of norovirus cases at the hospital increased.

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust reduced the amount it spent on the anti-bacterial hand gels at Sandwell General Hospital from £40,000 in 2015 to £30,000 last year.

Meanwhile, the number of Norovirus cases reported at the hospital increased from 16 to 22.

The decision to make cuts was defended by the hospital trust, which said day-to-day operations 'have not been affected'.

Elaine Newell, chief nurse at Sandwell General Hospital, said: 'As part of our procurement processes we regularly review the cost effectiveness of the products we use to ensure best value for money.'

Safety

'This does not affect the day-to-day operations of our hospitals.'

'We don't compromise on patient safety when making a decision on the product to use.'

At Russells Hall Hospital, managed by Dudley Group NHS Trust, £15,808 was spent on the hand gels last year. It had five cases of Norovirus in the same period.

A WOMAN who caused 'panic and alarm' when she called nurseries across the West Midlands threatening to arrive with knives and guns and 'kill everyone' has been given a suspended prison sentence.

Terrified staff gathered children indoors, locking windows and doors while they waited for police to arrive, Birmingham Magistrates Court heard. Eight malicious calls were made by Rebecca Cooper, of Park Hill Street, The Baffery, Dudley, on Wednesday of last week.

The nurseries were picked at random by the 22-year-old who told police she wanted 'to cause as much upset as possible and frighten people'.

Among those targeted was Fairytale Day Nursery in Dudley, The Stanmore Day Nursery in Edgbaston, ABC Nursery in Coventry and Sunrise Day Nursery in Sutton Coldfield.

Prosecutor, Mr Peter Lawn, said Cooper attempted to disguise her voice, pretended to be in a gang and said she was going to go with weapons, including knives and guns, and kill everyone.

He said: 'This caused extreme panic and alarm.' Cooper told police she did not know what she would have done had she not been arrested.

The court heard Cooper had a history of similar offences, including making abusive calls to 999 operators.

By Marion Brennan

Mr Antony Schiller, defending, told the court that Cooper, who suffers from Asperger's, had been before the court on 64 occasions.

He said: 'When she loses self-control she will either phone or send letters of an offensive nature. When she is angry or low she will randomly phone people and rant.'

She had never carried through her threats.

Mr Schiller added: 'This is a cry for help.'

Cooper was sentenced to 24 weeks in prison suspended for two years and must pay £165 court costs. She admitted making eight menacing phone calls and racially aggravating a police officer.

She also admitted sending a distressing text to a woman in October and being in breach of an 18-month conditional discharge.

Science event goes off with a Big Bang



Chelsea Nish from St Chad's Catholic Primary School in Sedgley takes part in an experiment

THOUSANDS of students from across the Black Country got a glimpse into the exciting world of science, maths and engineering at this year's Big Bang Fair.

The event at Birmingham's NEC aims to show children how a love of the two subjects can lead to careers in engineering and technology.

Students were able to take part in a variety of activities and workshops run by science and engineering-based companies. They could even try their hand at surgery, identifying body parts in a gooey rubber doll to develop biology skills.

X-rays

Birmingham City University put on that popular workshop, also teaching children about the skeleton and X-rays.

Tata consultancy and Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) were on hand to show how thermal imaging cameras can be used and how technology is advancing in the industry. Robots were also on display with students given the chance to compete against each other using them.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ex-United star at club's dinner

TICKETS are still available for a sporting dinner with Halesowen-born footballer Lee Sharpe.

Sharpe, 45, who played for Manchester United and Leeds United during a distinguished career, is the special guest at Dudley Town's annual sporting dinner tonight (Thursday).

The event at the Copthorne Hotel, at The Waterfront in Brierley Hill, runs from 6pm to 9pm.

Tickets cost £35 each and include a two course meal and entertainment from comedian Lea Roberts. Call 01902 244220.

Sharpe enjoyed a successful career playing for United under Sir Alex Ferguson, winning the Premier League title three times and the FA Cup twice.

Exhibition looks at M5 viaduct work

MOTORISTS, residents and businesses are being invited to find out more about a repair scheme taking place on the M5 in the Black Country.

Highways England host public exhibitions this week to advise people about work to improve the Oldbury viaduct.

Waterproofing is wearing out under the road surface between junctions one for West Bromwich and junction two for Oldbury. The 18-month project starts next month. The next exhibition is Sainsbury's SavaCentre in Oldbury tomorrow (Friday) between 10am and 8pm.

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What a fuss we all know we are the greater one

THERE has been a bit of a fuss about the Black Country being marketed as "Greater Birmingham" over at the annual regeneration jolly in the South of France.

While I normally recoil at any attempt to associate the Black Country with our noisy neighbours down the M6, on this occasion I think people are being a little bit harsh.

There's probably an innocent explanation. Indeed, I think it might be nothing more sinister than a simple typing error. They meant to say Greater THAN Birmingham.

□□□

IN September 2013, Nicola Sturgeon told Scottish people to seize the "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" and vote for separation from the UK in the following year's referendum.

Now she is demanding another vote.

Look, I know life expectancy isn't what it should be north up there, but I think three-and-a-half years is pushing it a bit, don't you?

□□□

TERRIBLE news from down-under. Apparently, unless a new deal can be struck with Channel 5, Neighbours could finally come to an end in the UK after 31 years. Now be honest, how many of you actually knew it was still going?

□□□

IMAGINE for one moment you worked at the London Evening Standard. Not a pleasant thought, I admit, having to live down in the Big Black Smoke, but work with me on this one.

Having given you all for a few decades, you have worked your way up the ladder, and then the vacancy for the editor appears – and is given to somebody with next to no experience of the industry, has no formal journalistic qualifications, but who used to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. That will be good for morale.

Frankly, I couldn't care less how many jobs George Osborne has. Being a back-bench MP should never be anything more than a part-time job, and paid accordingly. It is the rise of the full-time MP that has created a generation of meddling career politicians with no experience of life outside Westminster.

What is ridiculous though is the way somebody so demonstrably under-qualified can walk straight out of Downing Street into such a difficult and demanding role.

The suspicion is that he won't really be editor at all, simply using the paper as a political platform while other, better qualified people actually do the work.

Still, for politicians wanting to bring those pesky newspapers to heel, there are worse ways than getting a few of your own in to run them. I bet Leveson wished he had thought of that.

It's the wealthy who objected to Hammond NI rises



Philip Hammond – humiliating U-turn was 'necessary to maintain voters' trust'



Judge Lindsey Kushner – only saying what a normal, loving parent would say



Nigel Farage – a blistering feud with the party's only MP Douglas Carswell

White Van Man — I don't think so

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



WAS anyone convinced, on Budget day, that the raging fury over the Budget was the authentic voice of White Van Man, roused to rebellion at the prospect of higher National Insurance payments? No, me neither. It all happened far too quickly. MPs simply didn't have time to consult their white-van supporters, even assuming they know any. But then we shouldn't assume that all self-employed folk are horny-handed sons of toil, nor that Chancellor Philip Hammond's U-turn in scrapping the NI rises will be celebrated in back-street pubs with pints of mild and a bag of crisps for the whippet. The term "self-employed" covers some extremely wealthy, well-connected and influential types, such as barristers, Fleet Street columnists and broadcasters who did not take kindly to Hammond's rises. History will record that this was a rebellion among white collars, not white vans.

I BET we were all delighted to see the lorry owned by a pair of despicable fly-tippers in Hertfordshire being sent to the crusher. Pity the fly-tippers weren't inside.

WHAT is the point of the continued existence of UKIP, now that voters endorsed the concept of Brexit in the referendum last June? You might think they would quietly and happily disperse under the banner of 'mission accomplished'. But no. UKIP does not disperse and it certainly does not do anything quietly. At the moment, they are engaged in a bitter and savage civil war of self-destruction that makes the troubles in the Labour Party seem tame by comparison. UKIP's former leader Nigel Farage is having a blistering feud with the party's only MP, Popeye the Sailor Man lookalike Douglas Carswell, who is said to be inching back towards his former party the Tories again.

YOUR kids are going out into town for the night. You tell them to take care. Or at least you

do if you are a normal, loving parent. And that's what Judge Lindsey Kushner was doing when she noted on her last day in court that women and girls who get blind drunk tend to be targeted by would-be rapists. If you believe all you see, the judge was widely condemned for 'victim-blaming'. But that's simply not true. I bet 90 per cent of the population thoroughly agree with her. What we saw in the media was a contrived and artificial controversy.

It was based on the views of a tiny number of campaigners and single-issue 'experts' who claim the judge's remarks may make women less likely to report rape. But Judge Kushner was desperately trying to prevent rapes happening in the first place, rather than picking up the pieces afterwards.

DOG walkers in wooded areas should stop using poo bags and adopt a "stick & flick" method, according to the Forestry Commission which has produced a poem to make the point: "If your dog should do a plop, take a while and make a stop / Just find a stick and flick it wide into the undergrowth at the side." I find myself also moved to verse, to point out the possible hazards of the new method: "Make sure the dog's got lots of space / 'Cos stick-flicked *** goes all over the place."

PITY we didn't have a public naming competition for the Royal Navy's latest aircraft carrier which, as reported a few days ago, is overdue, over budget, understaffed and still waiting for its warplanes. HMS Whiteelephant McWhiteelephantface?

APPARENTLY we should all be more worried about nitrogen pollution than global warming. Yes, I know it's going to be hard after 20 years spent fretting about greenhouse gases but you don't want to be left behind in the anxiety stakes, do you? A charity called Plantlife claims air pollution caused by agriculture and engines is over-enriching our soil and encouraging the growth of "thuggish" plants such as nettles. Sorry to spoil the angst party but nettles are wonderful things. They are one of the most useful plants on the planet, rich in iron and vitamin C. You can eat them in salads, turn them into soup, brew them as tea or even turn them into nettle-yarn fabric. You could argue that an excess of nitrogen is giving us great bounty of a miracle crop. But that would be good news, and who wants that?

THE Scots were assured by their political leaders that the 2014 vote on independence from the UK would be a "once in a generation" referendum. They are now being told to expect another one in a year or so. This one will also be a "once in a generation" referendum – unless they vote the wrong way again.

HALF-watching the telly, I caught the Prime Minister telling the Commons about a "caterry trade delegation." I was heartened to think someone as busy as Mrs May could find time to chat with people providing holiday accommodation for cats. The delegation turned out to be Qatar.

MORE issues with the new £5 note. A reader writes: "Is it just me or does the new five-pound note have a life of its own?" He reports a problem with "escaping" fivers creeping out of his shirt pocket and wonders whether some curious reaction is going on between the polymers in the note and the polymers in the shirt material. Fascinating.

TALKING POINT

Attention! That's my Mother's Day wish

THERE is good news and bad news for my children as Mother's Day looms.

I do not want them to splash out on a bunch of flowers that will be considerably more expensive in the days before Mothering Sunday than at any other time of year with the exception, possibly, of Valentine's Day.

I do not want a novelty, twee gift such as a plaque or a vase with some motivational poem/message/logo on and I don't expect a huge and/or expensive card.

And I most certainly do not want to be wined and dined in an over-booked pub or restaurant. Inevitably tables are crammed together while the mass of increasingly bored children try to run around in the few gaps, adding to the wall of noise and the irritation that is already rising from the predictable wait as hordes of diners descend.

So that's the good news for my children. I am, if nothing else, a cheap date.

However, the bad news, they may think, is that I have to have their full, undivided attention for the day.

Despite the nauseating sentimentality and commercial hype today, Mother's Day was first celebrated in the UK in the 17th century which is long before America adopted it.

It began as Mothering Sunday and at a time when children were often sent away to work as servants or apprentices. It was considered important that children were allowed to visit their homes once a year. The time decided for the visit to home was the middle Sunday of the fasting period of Lent.

In these modern times, I consider myself lucky if I can pin my two teenagers down for one day a year – certainly when they are not busy staring at their hands – or rather the phones permanently in them!

Mother's Day, like Halloween or Valentine's Day, or even Christmas, is in danger of being swallowed up by the commercial opportunists. It has already been hyped up to such an extent that we just see it as another expense and more pressure to impress. Mother's Day doesn't even have the bonus of being a bank holiday.

Well I reject the hype – though that doesn't let my children totally off the hook.

On MY Mothering Sunday I want quality time with my children, I don't want to have to cook the dinner and I'd like quite the odd cuppa made for me too. I'd like to spend time chatting, maybe watch a film or take a walk, but most of all I want a relaxed day when none of us are rushing off or tied up.

Of course, Lent quickly leads into Easter and my children don't mind the hype if it means a great big calorific chocolate egg for them. So they might want to remember who gets that egg when planning my Mother's Day this year!

DIANE DAVIES

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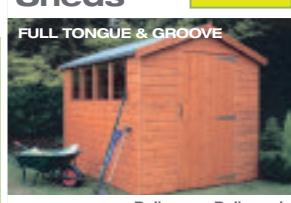
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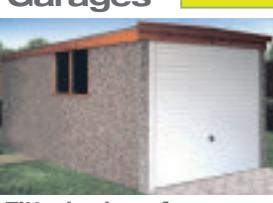
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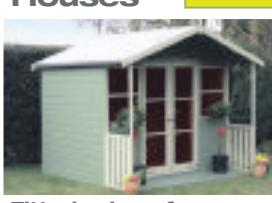
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Make prisoners pay for food and lodging

THERE is a crisis in elderly care. Our elders go into hospital to have treatment for their ailments. When they are ready to go out, because someone on their own, they can't take care of themselves and thus stay in hospital taking up a bed when it is wanted for someone else.

Reason? Local authorities have been closing their care homes down because of the cuts that this Government has been imposing on them.

If an elderly person has to go into a care home, whether it be private or council-owned, and if they have

a home that they own and money in the bank, then the house is sold and money taken until the person only has a small amount of money left. This person has saved all of their life and paid their taxes. A person who is on benefits doesn't have to pay anything apart from their pension if he or she has retired.

That is the system, in other words, through no fault of their own, they have to pay to be looked after in care homes.

So now look at our prison system. A person who has committed a crime

and is found guilty and has to go to jail, he or she gets three meals a day and the best facilities regarding recreation. Whether the person has money or not, they don't have to pay a penny.

So why should they get away with free lodging? Like the elderly in care homes, why shouldn't anyone who goes to jail, and has money and assets, pay? The money could go towards funding for the care home's and ensure that the pressure is taken off the NHS bedding crisis.

BOB WHITEHOUSE
Kingswinford

Working the land after Brexit

JUST watched the news; one item mentioned farmers' concerns over a lack of seasonal workers from Europe because of Brexit.

Surely with our overflowing prisons and young offender institutions, those needing to perform community service and even people claiming long-term jobseekers allowance, there are enough potential workers to meet our agricultural needs?

Obviously I'm not talking about axe murderers and I appreciate that a level of supervision would be required, but the chance to learn new skills and provide a valuable contribution to society would be seized by some people, especially if they were paid.

My son was once on job-seekers allowance and would have accepted any work, but at no time during many fruitless, soul destroying visits to the job centre did we ever see any adverts for farm workers.

SUSAN CLARKE
Stourbridge

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

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expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Code of Practice: Our policy is to correct errors as soon as we can. The Chronicles adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice, which can be seen at

Diesel motorists get a rough deal

ONCE again the driver of the diesel is the target for more taxation. The modern diesel has EGR valves to re-circulate exhaust gases back into the engine for further burning and then a diesel particle filter within the exhaust system to capture and burn off soot resulting in lower emissions.

This Government will reduce our car values by thousands of pounds without compensation - then increase petrol prices further to compensate for their loss of revenue, as they did when they advised the public to go diesel.

They should target the buses and HGVs that belt out black smoke and spoil our roads, which have been re-surfaced. Take a look at Wolverhampton Street, Dudley, and Birmingham New Road; hundreds of thousands wasted. But hey - it's only the taxpayer's money.

MR G HULME
Dudley

I'm a victim of the bus lane sting

LIKE your correspondent Adrian Dring, I'm another victim of the great Wolverhampton 'bus lane sting'.

I drove my wife to the station to drop her off, as I normally do, but was met with a barrier across the road. I had no idea what to do at this point - there were no signs to assist.

She got out with her heavy suitcase just past the barrier and walked to the station, then I looked for a way out. I carried on driving and fell foul of the new bus lane restrictions in Victoria Square. On returning from holiday a nasty brown envelope awaited me containing a £30 fine (pay immediately or it'd be £60!).

I found it very difficult to find any information about where to drop people as an alternative. I did consider protesting but paid up like a good boy - the publicity of a letter might be more effective in highlighting the council's sharp practice.

MARTIN JONES
Sedgley

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Arrest after brutal attack on security guard, aged 73

A MAN has been arrested on suspicion of attempted murder after a security guard was attacked at a Brierley Hill factory.

The guard, aged 73, was assaulted at Stoke Forgings, a metal factory in Vine Street, at around 1pm on Sunday. Police believe the guard was hit numerous times during a 'prolonged attack' lasting around 15 minutes. They believe he was beaten with a shovel.

A 44-year-old man, of no fixed address, was arrested at around 1am on Tuesday in the Holly Hall area of Dudley. He remains in police custody helping detectives with their inquiries.

Detective Inspector Colin Mattinson from Force CID said: "The security guard was left with serious head injuries and remains in a critical condition in hospital."

"Enquiries are on-going and I would ask anyone who saw anything in the Vine Street area on Sunday or anyone who has knowledge of this attack to call us as soon as possible on 101 or call Crimestoppers confidentially on 0800 555 111."

The guard was discovered by a colleague starting work at around 7pm.

CCTV

As The Chronicle went to press he remained in a critical condition in hospital.

The main entrance to the factory site has an electronic gate and is surrounded by walls and railings.

Detective Inspector Colin Mattinson from Force CID said: "This was a sustained and violent attack on an elderly man."

"We believe he challenged a man found inside the premises, which led to the unprovoked attack taking place."

"Inquiries are continuing and we are studying CCTV and carrying our forensic investigations at the scene. We are still trying to establish what the man was doing inside the premises and what, if anything, was stolen."

The event on May 25 will take place at the newly-opened Birmingham Conference and Events Centre (BCEC), in Hill Street, and will include festival favourites, New Orleans-inspired band Tipitina.

Since its 1985 debut, the festival has generated more than £68 million, putting on 6,072 performances - mostly for free.

Jim Simpson, festival director, said: "The festival has so much to celebrate. This year sees our 33rd anniversary, making it the longest-running festival in Birmingham, the longest jazz festival in England and the largest free jazz and blues event in Europe."

Tickets, priced at £40, include dinner, available from www.eventbrite.co.uk website.

Cancer care nets memorial donation



Paul Coley and Ron Wakeman, friends of the late Cyril Cartwright, with fundraising manager Karen Phillips

DONATIONS in memory of a devoted supporter of the non-league football scene have helped a club and a hospital.

ley Metro Cups Competition, which also raised money for Black Country hospitals.

Paul Coley and Ron Wakeman, both friends of Mr Cartwright, presented the cheque to the Cancer Appeal at Russells Hall Hospital last week.

Karen Phillips, fundraiser manager at the hospital, said: "This donation is incredibly special to us in memory of Mr Cartwright. He had a big affiliation with the hospital, helping and supporting us."

She added: "Cyril suffered frequent illness during his final years and always spoke in glowing terms of the care he received from Russells Hall."

The Dudley Metro Cups Competition involved many Black Country teams, including Dungs Bank, Dudley Wood Athletic, Kinver and Mr Cartwright's beloved Quarry Bank Celtic.

Since 1992 almost £15,000 has been donated to hospitals from the competitions, and the fundraising started in the 1950s.

Coroner hears driver may have fallen asleep

A TEENAGER who died when his car hit a tree and burst into flames may have fallen asleep at the wheel, an inquest heard.

Jack de Bell was travelling along a commuter route between the Black Country and Telford, the B4176 in the direction of Sutton Maddock, on December 3 when his silver Ford Fiesta left the road and struck an oak tree.

Mr John Ellery, the senior coroner for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin heard it was possible that the 18-year-old had fallen asleep at the wheel as he made his way to work.

At the inquest at Shrewsbury's Shirehall, collision investigator PC Nick Stafford said that there had been no apparent reason for the crash and no defects with the car.

Mr Ellery was told that Jack, from Kinver, had gone to bed at around 12.30am and had woken up to go to work at around 3.45am. The accident happened at around 4.30am.

Jack's parents suggested he could have fallen asleep at the wheel. A post mortem gave a medical cause of death as multiple injuries.

Mr Ellery concluded that Jack, a former Kinver High School student, died as a result of a road traffic collision. He said: "There is no evidence that this was a deliberate act. However, it is certainly possible he fell asleep at the wheel, which unfortunately took the life of this industrious young man."

Opportunity to join the ghostbusters for night

AN animal sanctuary in the Black Country is hosting a paranormal evening. Wolf Paranormal Events run the event from 7pm to 2am in the grounds of Brockswood, Cotwall End, Sedgley, on Saturday.

Visitors will be shown how to use detection equipment by the investigators during the ghost hunting night. Entry costs £2, which includes a hot buffet and drinks. To book a place visit www.brockswood.org website.

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Bush dogs return to zoo with a sister act



The threatened species look more like badgers or otters than dogs, and have a new home in Dudley

THREE fluffy sisters are settling in at their new home, marking the return of bush dogs to Dudley Zoo after a five-year absence.

With their round ears, webbed feet and short legs, they may not look much like dogs, but the semi-aquatic South American mammals are in fact part of the canine family.

Three-year-old sisters Scarlet, Ruby and Rioja have relocated to the heart of the Black Country from Twycross Zoo.

Sarah Evans, senior keeper, said: "We're really pleased to have bush dogs again, especially a young pack. We've returned them to the enclosure where our last pack lived, so we hope they'll show really well there as they seem very lively girls."

"They have only been here for a few days, so are still settling in, but we've already identified Ruby as the dominant female, as she is more inquisitive. Rioja is very noisy and Scarlet seems the quieter one."

A near threatened species, bush dogs are native to Central and South America, but are losing their habitat for farming.

Prison for thug who held pistol to ex's face

A JEALOUS thug pushed a handgun against the cheek of the terrified woman who had jilted him, a judge was told.

She then heard a 'click', which could have been the trigger, as they sat in his car on a remote farm track, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard.

Richard Preston told her: "I would rather see you dead than with anyone else."

He was ruled a danger to the public and given a six-year jail term with an extended period of licence on release.

The woman ended the eight-month relationship after a series of 'unpleasant assaults', said Mr David Iles, prosecuting.

Scarred

She had been scarred both physically and emotionally by regular beatings during which the vicious 28-year-old hit and even bit her, the court heard. "She had hoped he would change but he didn't," added Mr Iles.

On August 25 she agreed to meet him again for dinner but was driven from Wordsley to a bridle path near Enville where he produced the pistol.

After twice threatening

By John Scott

her with the unloaded gun, Preston calmed down, apologised and drove her home.

But four days later, when they met again, he struck her across the throat and bit her hand. Police were called and Preston was arrested.

Mr Niall Skinner, defending, said Preston had been addicted to steroids but the father-of-one had been weaned off them during seven months spent in custody before sentencing.

Preston from Brooklands, Wordsley, admitted assaults, possession of an imitation gun with intent to cause fear, driving when disqualified and criminal damage. He was jailed by Judge Amjad Nawaz, who told him: "You are a jealous and obsessive man. You are a ticking time bomb."

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10 Cheaters have put town on the adultery map in survey

STOURBRIDGE has been ranked the most adulterous town in the West Midlands in new survey.

The Infidelity Index compiled by IllicitEncounters.com – which describes itself as ‘the UK’s leading married-dating website’ – mapped data from its 1.1 million members against each town’s adult population in a bid to find the most adulterous towns and cities in the country. The website claims Stourbridge is home to 738 adulterers, which would mean 1.17 per cent of the entire adult population are allegedly cheating.

It wasn’t the only town from the region to feature in the top 140 towns. Halesowen was ranked 46th, Walsall 61st, Willenhall 77th, West Bromwich 87th and Dudley 88th.

According to the survey, the most adulterous town in the country is Royal Tunbridge Wells in Kent, while Barry in South Wales was ranked the least adulterous.

IllicitEncounters spokesman Christian Grant said: “People have had affairs since the dawn of time, but the last decade in particular has seen a large spike.

“The site has grown exponentially, and it’s thanks to the turbulent economy and increase in house prices that has left many people financially crippled – unable to divorce should their marriage hit the rocks.

Cheaper

“So, they seek the only other viable alternative that they have: an affair. It’s cheaper than a divorce and it’s safer than ever before.

“With no less than seven towns in the top 140, the West Midlands has clearly established itself as one of the most adulterous regions in the entire country, though it does house Sutton Coldfield, the eighth most faithful town in the UK.

FANS of Bollywood have the opportunity to enjoy a spectacular experience at a gala dinner and dance raising cash for charities.

The dinner-dance is being held at Dudley Town Hall, organised by the EKTA Group to raise money for the Mayor of Dudley’s charities.

It will take place on Saturday, April 8, from 7pm, when guests can enjoy a three-course meal with live entertainment. Tickets are from £18 with a discount available for groups of 10 or more. Balcony tickets providing entertainment only are available for £10.

Councillor Mohammed Hanif, Mayor of Dudley, said: “I’m delighted that this event has been organised to raise money for my nominated charities. It will provide fun and entertainment for everyone and I would encourage people to book their tickets quickly to avoid disappointment.”

Call (01384) 812812 or email ekta@matad amandir.org.uk for more information.

10

Bollywood is theme for dinner dance

Paralympic hero meets schoolchildren



Paralympic gold medalist Jonnie Peacock MBE visits Kates Hill pupil Rylan Bishop

PUPILS struck gold when Paralympian and gold medal athlete Jonathan Peacock stopped by to visit them at their school in Dudley.

Students at Kates Hill Primary School welcomed 23-year-old Jonathan, an English sprint runner and amputee, won gold at the 2012 Summer Paralympics and 2016 Summer Paralympics, representing Great Britain in the T44 men’s 100 metres event.

The visit was organised by BT after the school won a national competition which saw the youngsters highlight the benefits of superfast broadband.

The school’s entry was then randomly selected from hundreds submitted by schools across the country.

Jonathan said: “It’s my first trip to Dudley. It’s been absolutely fantastic to meet all of the kids, they’ve asked me all sorts of questions. One of the children asked about my dog and what breed it is, which was very cool.

“I was also speaking to one of the teachers and a lot of the children do around a mile worth of walking every day, which is awesome.

“We didn’t do that sort of thing in school and being active is so important. Even if it’s just a 15 to 20 minute walk, it’s great that a lot of schools are trying to become more active. It’s very important to have an active lifestyle.”

Jonathan added: “I’m doing a lot of winter training. It’s time to get back into the hard work.”

Teacher Kevin Orchard said: “The children were thrilled to meet Jonnie.”

Trampoline park bounces in with 33 jobs

A NEW trampoline park could be bouncing into Dudley as plans are in the pipeline for one of the popular leisure attractions to be created at a former warehouse site.

The proposed complex, which has been proposed for the site in Birmingham Road, would create 33 jobs and have space to accommodate up to 60 people on trampolines at any one time.

Ward councillors have welcomed the move, saying it would help attract more people to the area.

The site is located opposite the large Tesco store, off the Birmingham New Road.

Leap Dudley Limited is seeking to convert the former warehouse to a trampoline park and community hub.

Councillor Shaukat Ali, a representative of St Thomas’s ward, said: “Trampolining seems to be the ‘in’ thing at the moment, so I welcome the plans.”

“Any business where new jobs can be created will be good for the area. I hope the owners are successful with the project.”

Alongside the trampolines, the facility also plans to feature a community information hub, a restaurant focusing on healthy eating, a soft play area for toddlers and a sensory room.

The application will be put forward to planning bosses at Dudley Council.

‘Eyesore’ derelict pub on market for £245k

AN arson-hit former pub in the Black Country has been put on the market for more than £240,000.

The Royal Oak, on Whitehall Road in Tipton, has been attacked by vandals after standing derelict for more than 10 years.

It is has now been put up for sale for £245,000 with The Property Shop along with the two adjoining houses.

It had been branded an ‘eyesore’ amid calls for its demolition.

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Cyclist Hugh leads the way on charity ride for hospice

A CYCLING legend will give a masterclass in pedal power when he takes to the roads in his latest biking challenge.

Four-times World Pursuit Champion Hugh Porter has organised a charity bike ride offering cyclists a choice of three distances. Last year's inaugural ride attracted 580 cyclists.

The cycling veteran, aged 77, will be taking part in the short distance cycle. He still rides regularly but wants to get back to the finishing line in time to give out the medals.

He said: "It's going to be a cracking day. I'd love to get 1,000 people taking part."

The Round the Wrekin Sportive, which will raise money for Compton Hospice, will take place on May 21 from Kingswinford Rugby Club, and will head towards the Shropshire Hills taking in Long Mynd and

Stiperstones. Cyclists can choose between a distance of just over 100 miles, around 60 miles or 25 miles, depending on ability and inclination.

Mr Porter, from Wolverhampton, will be taking part in the shortest route through Bobbington, Claverley and Pattingham. He said: "The 100-miler will be an epic ride which will interest a lot of serious club cyclists, while the middle-distance ride is the one we expect to attract the biggest number of entrants. The short ride is ideal for families or people who are new to cycling."

The start route and the return route are the same for everyone, with different loops of varying length. Whichever route, people will be able to see the Wrekin, more or less, all the time." Last year's challenge raised just under £22,000 for Compton Hospice.



Hugh Porter, centre, will be in the saddle for a charity ride over a choice of distances from Kingswinford

Rise in number of people out of work

UNEMPLOYMENT in the West Midlands rose in three months to January — despite the UK rate falling to its lowest since the summer of 1975.

The regional total of 160,000 was up 9,000 (or five per cent) on the August to October quarter with the unemployment rate up from 5.3 per cent to 5.6 per cent.

Nationally unemployment fell by 31,000 in the three months to January, to 1.58m, the lowest for a decade, giving a jobless rate of 4.7 per cent. Almost 32 million people are now in work, a jump of 92,000 over the quarter and 315,000 compared with a year earlier.

Figures for last month for people claiming unemployment benefits, including Universal Credit — where people are required to seek work — and Jobseeker's Allowance, were also up across the region. The West Midlands total rose 3,065 to 85,800 with Staffordshire up 210 to 5,485.

The gradual introduction of Universal Credit in the region has distorted figures because it widens the number of people who can claim.

Dudley's total was up by 110 to 5,800 (three per cent).

Plastic pipe work aims to improve tap water

NEARLY £400,000 will be spent on replacing old pipes in Stourbridge to stop brown water flowing out of taps.

The six-month scheme will be carried out along Racecourse Lane, near Stourbridge Golf Club, and is aimed at resolving a long-standing problem with discoloured water, which has been put down to the age of the cast iron pipes.

The road will be closed between the junctions of Norton Road and Ounty John Lane while the work is carried out and motorists are being warned to expect delays.

A diversion will be put in place on Norton Road, Heath Lane, Hagley Road, and Worcester Lane.

Severn Trent has been receiving complaints about discoloured water from residents in the area for years.

The replacement scheme, which will see crews lay down three kilometres of plastic pipes, will benefit around 200 homes.

Dangerous

Councillor Heather Rogers, who is represents Norton Ward, which covers the areas of Norton and parts of Oldswinford and Pedmore, said there was no way to avoid shutting off Racecourse Lane to traffic during the work.

"The road is very dangerous because there's no pavement and there's a lot of blind and dangerous corners so drivers can't see the traffic coming," she explained.

"There's no other option than to shut the road."

The scheme will also af-

Money pledged for better centre access

PATIENTS affected by the merger of two GP surgeries have convinced health bosses to provide an extra £62,000 to carry out improvements.

Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) announced plans to relocate Limes Medical Practice into Netherton Health Centre on the opposite side of Halesowen Road.

As a result, more than 3,000 patients will start attending Netherton Health Centre, with its roll of 7,500 patients, based just 75 metres away.

But patients raised concerns about a poor route from the car park to the Netherton Health Centre building. Now the CCG has agreed to provide the additional funding to improve the access route.

Work on a new footpath is expected to start in the next few months. The CCG says access to the building will not be affected during this time.

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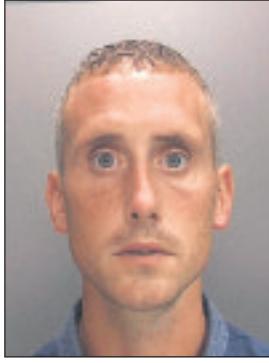
12 Search is on for most wanted suspects in the Black Country



Niron Parker-Lee



Daniel Glowacki



Damian Hill



Derick Copeland



Johnny Connors

MURDER, robbery and burglary – these are just some of the crimes that the Black Country's most wanted are being hunted down for by West Midlands Police.

A gallery of the region's most wanted suspected criminals displays those suspected of many serious offences, but who are yet to be caught.

Detectives continue to search for a key suspect wanted in connection with the murder of 24-year-old Mansoor Mahmood, who was stabbed to death in Brierley Hill's High Street back in October.

He is 19-year-old Niron Parker-Lee from the Brierley Hill area of Dudley.

Report by Judith Hawkins

A murder inquiry was launched after Mr Mahmood was found on the High Street at around 4.45pm on Saturday, October 15 and later died in hospital.

DI Harry Harrison, from homicide, said: "It's important we locate Niron Parker-Lee as soon as possible and I would urge anyone with information about his whereabouts to contact us.

"Someone knows where this man is and I'd remind them that harbouring a wanted man is a criminal offence and you may also face prosecution."

Parker-Lee is described as dangerous. He should not be approached by members of the public. Any sightings of him should be reported to police immediately on 999.

Police also continue to hunt for 34-year-old Damian Hill, wanted in connection to a robbery at Costcutters on Wynnall Lane, Wollscote on December 20 at about 10.10pm.

Hill is described as white, medium build and 5ft 9ins tall. He has green eyes, short brown hair and has a Midlands accent.

He has pierced ears, and a number of tattoos including '666' on his neck 'Kylan 7/7/07' above a bulldog on his right arm and 'Kerrie' on right wrist.

He has connections to Stourbridge, Brierley Hill, Cradley, Halesowen, Oldbury and Handsworth. A number of attempts have been made to locate Hill, but officers are asking the public's help to find him.

If you have any information call 101. Also wanted for questioning is Der-

ick Copeland following a burglary at Goldthorn Park in Wolverhampton last November. Copeland, aged 55, has links to Coalpool, Walsall, Perry Barr, Handsworth and Wolverhampton. He is described as a black and 5ft 9ins tall.

A number of attempts have been made to locate Copeland, but police want the public's help.

Police are looking to find a man in connection with a number of thefts from elderly women on bus journeys.

Daniel Glowacki, aged 35, is wanted by both West Midlands Police and London's Metropolitan Police in connection with several thefts from elderly women's bags on bus journeys.

It concerns around 20 alleged offences across Sandwell, Dudley and London over a long period of time. National Express West Midlands is

offering a reward for anyone with information.

Tony Dallison, head of security at the bus company, said: "These thefts target elderly women using the bus and we are determined to put a stop to it. So we are offering a substantial amount to anyone who gives us information that leads to a conviction for these particularly despicable crimes."

A man wanted in connection with a distraction burglary in Wolverhampton is still being sought after another man's arrest.

Anyone with information about the whereabouts of Johnny Connors, 20, is urged to come forward.

If you can help police with their searches, call 101 or the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555111.

Uni brings in £3.5bn for the UK economy

THE University of Birmingham contributes £3.5 billion to the UK economy every year – enough to build seven flagship hospitals or 140 new secondary schools, new figures show.

A report published following research carried out by London Economics reveals that the country's first civic university now supports 15,545 jobs in the West Midlands – almost one in 50 jobs in Birmingham.

The report, which measured the economic impact of the University on the city of Birmingham and the West Midlands region during the 2014/15 academic year, was launched at the university's annual meeting.

London Economics placed the value of the University's international undergraduate students at more than £160 million in 2014/15.

The University's teaching contributes £1.34 billion to the UK economy, while its research and knowledge transfer activity is worth £885 million, with every £1 million of investment from UK Research Councils generating an additional £12 million to the economy.

Vice chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood, said: "The £3.5 billion figure clearly demonstrates that the University of Birmingham is not only a major economic force in the region, but also nationally and internationally."

Redrow donations to hospital nears £45k

MIDLANDS staff of house builder Redrow Homes have taken the total they have raised for Birmingham Children's Hospital over the last three years to almost £45,000.

The latest instalment of £6,250 brings the total donated by Redrow's Tamworth-headquartered Midlands business to £44,907.25.

Redrow, which has its head office in Flintshire, was founded in 1974 by former Wolves owner Steve Morgan.

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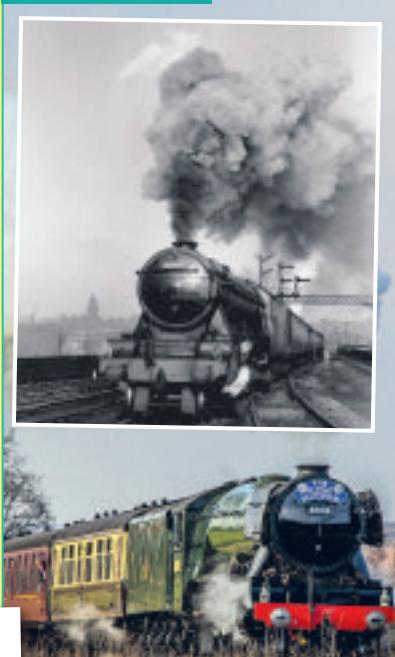
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A view into the past at glassworks



This rare photograph, seen at a collectors' fair, was taken at Chance Glassworks in Smethwick around 100 years ago. IT LOOKS like you are staring through a time portal into a world of yesteryear when the Black Country was the beating heart of industrial Britain.

IT LOOKS like you are staring through a time portal into a world of yesteryear when the Black Country was the beating heart of industrial Britain. This rare black-and-white photograph is thought to have been taken on the yard of the historic Chance Glassworks in Smethwick, 100 years ago. And what makes the photograph even more special is the illusion created, as the image – which is reflected off a lighthouse lens – is actually upside down.

The image has been shared by Mike Fenton, aged 55 from Oldbury, who

is a member of a campaign aiming to save and restore the historic site, which dates back to 1824. It is actually a photograph of a photograph.

Mike took the shot at a fair held in Malvern. He said: "The dealer was asking too much money for it, I felt, but I asked if I could photograph it for a nominal fee.

The information from the dealer was that it was taken in the yard of the glassworks in 1917. The set-up of the photograph seems to fit with other photographs and information I have seen about the works from that era.

Mike collects Chance Glassworks

memorabilia, including photographs, and part of his interest comes from the fact his grandfather and great-uncle worked at the site.

His grandfather, Benjamin Fenton, was a glass-blower between 1910 and the 1950s, while his great-uncle Arthur Fenton worked at the site around the same time.

The glassworks site, at Spon Lane near the M5, is now largely derelict, but is subject to an ambitious £25 million masterplan to create homes, offices and shops. A lighthouse will also form the centrepiece of the development, in a nod to the glassworks' past.

Mike collects Chance Glassworks

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More than 280 pupils excluded from school

MORE than 280 pupils have been permanently excluded from schools in Dudley over the past three years.

A total of 243 secondary school pupils and 40 primary school children in Dudley borough have been excluded from educational settings.

Nearly 6,000 pupils have also been temporarily excluded in the same period.

There are currently 26,385 pupils in primary schools and 17,018 pupils in secondary schools across the borough.

A total of 921 primary school pupils and 5,031 secondary school students were temporarily excluded in the past three years.

Placements

It means that just over one per cent of pupils were permanently excluded and more than 22 per cent of all pupils were temporarily excluded. More than 40 excluded children are currently awaiting alternative education provision.

As of October 2016, 105 schools in the borough were under council control.

UKIP councillor Paul Brothwood said: "It seems to be a high number of pu-

pils and it is concerning."

Conservative Councillor Patrick Harley said: "We expect pupils to behave and not disrupt lessons because we want the children to learn and don't want a culture where children are being excluded."

Education boss Councillor Ian Cooper, cabinet member for children's services, said: "We work hard with our schools to ensure that permanent exclusions are kept to a minimum."

"Schools run a range of interventions and support to retain children and young people in education. The vast majority of permanently excluded pupils are quickly re-integrated."

He added: "A school will only permanently exclude in extreme circumstances."

Honour for 1910 strike leader Mary



Tireless campaigner – Mary Macarthur gives a speech to the striking chainmakers in Cradley Heath

SHE led the women chainmakers in Cradley Heath to victory over a fair wage more than 100 years ago - and now Edwardian socialist Mary Macarthur is being honoured with a commemorative plaque.

The Scottish trade unionist and suffragist led the women chainmakers of Cradley Heath out of the workshops and onto the streets to protest at poor conditions and low wages and their victory paved the way for the minimum wage.

The strike lasted for ten weeks and is credited with changing the lives of thousands of workers on poor wages.

Born in Glasgow in 1880, Mrs Macarthur moved to London and continued the fight for equal pay and women's rights.

Now English Heritage has unveiled a blue plaque at her former home at 42 Woodstock Road, Golders Green, where she died from cancer in 1921.

Anna Eavis, Curatorial Director at English Heritage, called Mary Macarthur a 'remarkable woman', adding: "She was tireless in her battle for equal pay and better working conditions."

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One brother is a muslim, the other supports EDL

'I don't agree with it, but he's still my brother, I will never disown him. I love him'

English Defence League (EDL) supporter Lee Hadley was born less than three years after his brother Abdul-Rahmaan Tobin, then named Sean Tobin.

But the Black Country siblings are now at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to beliefs and way of life.

Yet they remain close, speaking regularly on the telephone and seeing each other every two months.

Abdul-Rahmaan was born at Sandwell General Hospital while his mother lived in Oldbury. When she moved to Doulton Road in Dudley she had Lee, and Louise, with husband Paul Hadley.

The half-brothers grew up to be very close, both supporting Wolves, playing together and mixing with the same friends.

School

Both attended Springfield Junior School in Dudley, then Heathfield High School in Cradley Heath, after the family moved.

Then, eight years ago on Christmas Day, Abdul-Rahmaan took his 'leap of faith'.

The 33-year-old said: "It was something which I had been thinking about for three or four years. When I found out Islam was the truth for me, I knew there was only one direction for me to go."

"My family is very liberal, they didn't understand but they accepted it."

He is married to Hina and lives in Birmingham with her and their two children, Muhammed Abdullah and daughter Zahra, and with Hina's children from a previous marriage, Fatima, Salaar and Mohaimin.



The brothers pictured together in the TV documentary on Channel 4



The brothers when youngsters, larking around in their Wolves kits

Mr Hadley, 30, an assembler from Cradley Heath, said: "We grew up very close, but as we grew older we saw each other less."

"When he told me, we had a chat, and I supported him, but we were obviously different in where we both stood. I am a very patriotic person, I love my country and I've become a supporter of the EDL."

"We did two or three marches against the plans for a new Dudley mosque."

Mr Hadley added: "We talked about it but we were sensible about it. I don't agree with it, but he is still my brother, I will never disown him. I still love him."

The pair appeared on Extremely British Muslims on Channel 4.

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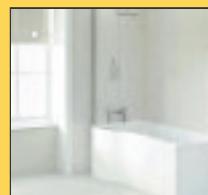
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Green oceans under threat

THE sun is out, the sap is rising and spring is in the air. There's nothing like a walk in the park on a crisp, sunny day.

Be it the glorious Victorian features of Wolverhampton's West Park, the ancient ruins of Priory Park in Dudley, or the lush woodland of Walsall's famous arboretum, there is something wonderful about the green open spaces which define our county.

"They are the lungs of the Black Country," says Councillor Mrs Hilary Bills, Dudley Council's cabinet member for environmental services, and secretary of the Friends of Hurst Green Park.

"We are very fortunate in the Black Country," she says. "We call it the Black Country, but we have got these oceans of green space."

But a recent report by MPs warns that many of these green oceans could be under threat if action is not taken soon.

Decline

The parliamentary local government select committee warned that Britain's parks are at a 'tipping point', facing a period of severe decline, due to a combination of funding pressures, weaknesses in the planning process, and a shortage of housing. It says more needs to be done to recognise the contribution parks make not just as a place of leisure, but to our mental and physical wellbeing.

The report says more than 92 per cent of park budgets have been cut by local authorities, which are themselves struggling to balance the books due to reduced funding from central government.

The West Midlands has certainly not been immune from these pressures. Wolverhampton Council has to make savings of £23.5 million over the next 2017/18 financial year, while Walsall Council is looking to save £86 million over the next four years, and inevitably parks are down the list of priorities compared to statutory provision which local authorities have to provide by law.



The flower beds in West Park, Wolverhampton looking in top condition

Walsall Council looked into scrapping cricket pitches and bowling greens in its parks, but ultimately rejected the proposals after public consultation.

Councillor Bills says there have been huge pressures in Dudley, too.

"Dudley has lost £258 million funding since 2011, that's a third of our total funding, and we have had to make staff reductions," she says.

"At the moment, the thing that is saving us is our wonderful friends groups who are giving up their time

volunteering for the good of the community."

The MPs' committee warns that the UK may not meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goal in respect of safe and inclusive access to parks and green spaces by 2030.

It calls on councils to produce strategic plans that recognise the value of parks beyond leisure and recreation, and set out how they will be managed to maximise their contribution to wider local authority agendas, such as

promoting healthy lifestyles, tackling social exclusion and managing flood risk. The plans could open up parks to support and funding from beyond their usual budgets and services areas, it adds.

The National Trust says the committee report is a "wake-up call". "It is full of practical proposals that show the problem can be solved if we act together now, with an ambition and spirit that reflects people's passion for parks," says the trust's Harry Bowell.



Trees line the lake at Walsall Arboretum



The revamped Priory Park in Dudley with reinstated rock garden



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Art made in the middle illustrates craft talent

A MAJOR craft exhibition displaying the work of up and coming Black Country artists is to go on display.

'Made in the Middle' is being held at the Parkside Gallery in Birmingham until April 28.

The eighth touring exhibition reveals the wealth of craft and applied art talent from the region, created by both recent graduates and established artists.

The work of 28 artists has been selected by a panel and is aimed at promoting the best of contemporary craft from makers living and working in the Black Country or with a strong regional connection. Tettishall artist John Grayson's work features what he describes as "Brexiters in kitten heels, pondering the future of Brexit."

Glass

Tim Boswell, from Wolverhampton, created Spooks out of blown glass and inspired by 1960s Op-art, 1970s fabric and the colours of local urban graffiti. Tim is a member of the Bandits of Glass, a group of glass artists founded in Stourbridge. They travel the country turning glass blowing demonstrations into a performance.

Chloé Smith of Tettishall Wood produced the Hakudo Diffusers range which was designed specifically to diffuse LED lighting to make it more suitable for domestic environments. Robyn Smith of Brierley Hill, created a range of interactive pieces, called 'Let me pick your brain', to throw light on experiences of mental health issues.

Dauvit Alexander of Bearwood, Sandwell created his work, Run of the Mill – a pun on a Judas Priest song, out of corroded iron and nuts, silver and gemstones.

The pieces have been created to remind Midlanders and Metalheads of



Run of the Mill, nod to Judas Priest



La Brexiteuse à Petits Talons



Beauty in Space is Aimee Bollu's exhibit

their shared heritage and industrial past. The exhibition is also an opportunity for people to buy and commission work for the artists.

Emma Daker, exhibitions and projects development manager at Craftspace said: "Craft is a vital source of revenue and innovation to the UK, 'Craft' generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy. 150,000 people are em-

ployed in businesses driven by craft skills. With recent changes to country's economy we are keen to highlight and explore the value of craft both in economic terms and social contribution.

The exhibition will continue its tour to major galleries across the region into 2018. For more information, visit madeinthemiddle.org



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"Can't fault it – with the building, the carers and the people. We have a laugh".

"Staff are wonderful, most helpful and kind".

"I'm happy here, and that's everything".

- Residents' comments

Try thinking outside the box to create a wonder wall

ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

with John Ridgway of Perry & Phillips



MANY people nowadays seem to fill their sitting room wall space with large TV screens . . . but they should really be thinking outside the box and adding some wall-mounted vintage items to create individual style.

Anything from prints and posters to photographs and framed postcards look great in any room and you don't have to shell out huge amounts of money on a masterpiece, good pieces of contemporary individual artwork can be bought on a limited budget.



Old prints used to be much sought after in the saleroom but in recent years have become less popular – which is a shame but means they can be bought for very reasonable prices.

They may not be suitable for a modern sitting room but could look very nice in a hallway or bedroom, especially if you buy several and hang them in a group.

Vintage mirrors make a huge difference to any room, hung in the right spot they reflect the light and give the illusion of more space so are ideal for smaller homes.

Photographs mounted in vintage frames can be displayed on any wall in a montage, they not only look attractive but always prove a talking point.

Movie, theatre and music posters are perfect for sitting rooms and home offices, as are old album covers and even vintage guitars if they can be displayed safely!

For a kitchen you can buy old metal advertising signs, both original and good quality replicas, and framed 'fashion plates' from magazines look lovely in a bedroom.

Old plates always look good on a wall – or displayed on plate rack – and you could go mad and buy a stag's head for a hallway, they are selling really well in the saleroom at present!

Collections of vintage postcards are nice, again these can be picked up in the saleroom for very reasonable prices, and framed old cigarette cards always look good.

Look out for limited edition prints – a large print can be a real statement piece in any room – and for works by contemporary artists.

And of course you can be a little quirky and display items such as hats on a wall, bowlers are nice in a hall and straw hats are pretty wherever they are hung.

So literally think outside that box and add some individual vintage wall style to your home!

Perry and Phillips hold valuation days, for sale items only, every Wednesday from 10am until 4pm.
The next Perry and Phillips sale of antiques and collectables takes place at the Mill Street saleroom in Low Town, Bridgnorth, on Tuesday April 4. Viewing will be during the weekend and on the Monday prior to the auction. New sale bidders are advised to attend the saleroom early on auction day to register and be allocated a bidding number.

Widen your horizons with a redesign at home



A pearlescent interior design

WE all change our living space so often these days.

It is relatively cheap to replace the design features in a neutral coloured room, white kitchens and plain tiled bathrooms, grey or taupe sitting and dining rooms give us a blank canvas to adorn. A feature wallpaper on one wall, a new rug and a change of ornaments transform our feeling of contentment.

We avidly follow the seasonal trends whether that be the clothing we wear, new styled jewellery, hairstyles or the decoration in our houses and we regularly change the overall look of our comfort zone. The manufacturers offer wide ranges of product, developed as soon as the trends feature in the designer shows and onto the market in a short space of time, ready for our love of something new.

This spring/summer there is a strong correlation between the clothing seen in the catwalk shows and the trends for interior styling. Bold florals, monochrome, pearlescent, hot pink and Mediterranean coastal. New perspectives to replace those ideas we loved and lived previously.

STYLE FOCUS

with Janet Timmis



Oversized prints on garments are a strong feature for spring, blooms and petals covering large areas, translating into wallpaper, curtain and furniture fabric, roses seemingly the favourite choice of flower. The designs relate well onto cushions and pottery, bold and colourful, powerful accents in a room.

The monochrome trend has been with us few a few years now, stylish and strong, black and white minimal geometric prints, simplified stripes and blocks, great contemporary styling. Often mixed with softer neutrals to soften the effect and perfect for streamlined kitchens and bathrooms.

Shimmering pastels sparkled in the designer shows and these metallic accents work so well as an interior effect. Mix a combination of subtle colours that change with the light and add luxe to simple styling.

How fabulous are the bright colours for this spring and summer? Especially the hot pink which will adorn our high-street stores. This seasons fuchsia, raspberry, rose and magenta translate so well into our homes, bedding, towels, sofas, vases and accessories of all types will put a smile on your face and dramatically change the cooler colours of previous seasons. Try mixing with the monochromes for an elegant look. Finally, the sunny Riviera brightens our outlook, sunny prints in bright primaries, deck chair stripes and blocks of vivid hue to achieve a happy visual sensation and remind us of holidays in warmer climes, clear crisp colours and a relaxed atmosphere, holidays at home.

Whatever your choice, however you change things, remember to plan the look, use highlights in small areas and strong choices of furniture as a feature, wallpaper to reflect your personality and lighting to generate your desired atmosphere. Enjoy the challenge and have fun.

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Regular pelvic floor exercises can help avoid uncomfortable problems



For many women the pelvic floor is a taboo subject

Ladies should take steps to exercise pelvic floor

TAKING good care of those floors, ladies?

Don't worry, you haven't just stumbled across an article from five decades ago – we're talking pelvic floors, and looking after them is almost certainly something you'll want to do.

Pelvic floor exercise isn't really given the air time it deserves. Maybe you first read about it in magazines as a teenager, in the context of enhanced sexual pleasure, though often we don't really become familiar with the concept until everyone starts having babies.

But even then, are you really sure what it means? Have you totally got to grips with doing it right?

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PELVIC FLOOR?

"The pelvic floor is a layer of muscles that extends from your tailbone to your pubic bone [back to front]. This layer forms a sling that's responsible for supporting your pelvic organs [bladder, bowel and uterus], maintaining continence, and has a role in sexual pleasure," explains Holly McKenzie, a women's health physiotherapist at London's BOOST Physio (www.boostphysio.com). Yes, it's in a region that adjoins your core muscles, but a strong core doesn't automatically equate to a strong pelvic floor. "There are numerous muscles that make

Report by Abi Jackson

up the core, the deeper stability muscles [transverse abdominis, multifidus and the pelvic floor muscles] and the larger global muscles [obliques, rectus abdominis and gluteus maximus]," says McKenzie. "Often when people work on their core, they focus too much on their abdominal muscles. This imbalance can strain the pelvic floor and increase their chance of developing dysfunction," McKenzie stresses.

IS PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISE REALLY IMPORTANT?

"It's very important," states McKenzie. "Up to a third of women will experience a problem with their pelvic floor at some point in their lifetime." The most common problems, she says, are urinary incontinence – which can range from mild [leaking a little when you laugh or run, for instance] to severe – and pelvic organ collapse.

"The pelvic floor also has a role in sexual pleasure, stability of the pelvis and lower back, maintaining bowel continence, and assists in labour by helping the baby's head turn," McKenzie adds. While the effects of pregnancy and childbirth are most commonly associated with pelvic floor dysfunction, it's something that can affect anybody - chronic constipation, high-impact exercise, heavy lifting, being overweight,

chronic cough and menopause can all also be associated, while injuries and chronic health conditions affecting this region may also play a part. "Regular pelvic floor exercises are essential for all women in the prevention and treatment of pelvic floor dysfunction," McKenzie stresses.

TABOO TOPIC?

"Like lots of women, I never really thought much about the pelvic floor until I had a baby," says Tania Boler, women's health expert and co-founder of Chiaro, a company specialising in women's wearable tech. "My husband's French and I discovered it's normal for French women to attend pelvic floor exercise classes after birth. I was shocked to learn nothing like this existed in other countries, and that one in three women will feel the effects of a weak pelvic floor." She notes that many women with back problems "realise they actually need to work on their pelvic floor muscles as they all work in tandem".

"The problem is," adds Boler, "most women don't think about it until they are pregnant and beginning to feel some of the health problems, such as bladder weakness or prolapse."

Encouraging greater discussion around women's health is a topic Boler's passionate about. "We go through very specific life stages, such as period, menopause and, for

many, pregnancy and childbirth. However, these are shrouded in mystery and taboo. As a result, women's health has been neglected, so women lack basic information and tools to make their lives easier."

SO WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING?

Hugh Hanley, national personal training manager at Virgin Active (www.virginactive.co.uk) advises that pregnant women do pelvic floor exercises (often known as 'kegels') daily. However it's a good idea for all women to get in the habit, as a preventative measure and for overall benefits to health, self-confidence and posture.

Unsure how to do them? "Gradually tighten the muscles you use if you want to stop the flow of urine when going to the toilet," explains Hanley. "Try to do it without holding your breath, squeezing your buttocks together. Hold the squeeze for several seconds and then relax slowly. "Now pull the muscles up tight and fast. Then relax. Then tightened them quickly again. Use clenching and opening your fist as a visual tool to help you imagine the movement."

There are also products that can help, such as Chiaro's Elvie (£149; www.elvie.com), a kegel exercise tracker in the form of a medical-grade silicon pod that connects via Bluetooth to an app, guiding women through the exercises and enabling them to monitor biofeedback.



Spring is here and everyone starts to become body conscious, but most of us will stick to what we know and are unsure of trying something new.

Many conversations that are had with new members of Gymophobics start in this way...

Q. I've tried lots of gyms and don't like them, why is Gymophobics so different?

A. Aside from the fact that it is only 30 minutes (as women are always busy) and there are no men (they hog all the best equipment!) and that it is a friendly place to be, Gymophobics takes a holistic approach to weight loss and fitness, therefore you get the whole package, not just one or the other and this really helps with motivation and ensures that you achieve your goals.

Q. Can it work for anyone?

A. Yes! It doesn't matter whether it's fitness, weight loss or just toning that you're looking for, as we write individual programmes for every member, their desires, strengths, health and previous exercise is all taken into consideration to ensure that it is the right programme for them using air resistance weights.

Q. Is it safe as I've never done weights before?

A. Air resistance weights are very safe on your joints but more importantly, there is always an instructor with you to ensure that technique is correct and we always do a full induction to address any health issues prior to using the circuit, updated every 10 weeks for changes or of course, improvement!

Q. So do I just come and shape my figure there then move on to a 'proper' gym?

A. Not at all! Our programmes are changed every 10 weeks therefore progression is never ending and we have members with us from when we opened nearly 4 years ago (in Halesowen) and they still find the programmes challenging. It's also such a fun and happy place to be, an experience not normally associated with gyms!

Q. Is there lots of jumping and running around?

A. As we don't work particularly on the cardio vascular system then no. We do encourage walking to keep the

heart healthy but getting hot and sweaty is not our idea of a workout here at Gymophobics.

Q. My concern is that I work full time, have children and am not sure that I can fit it in.

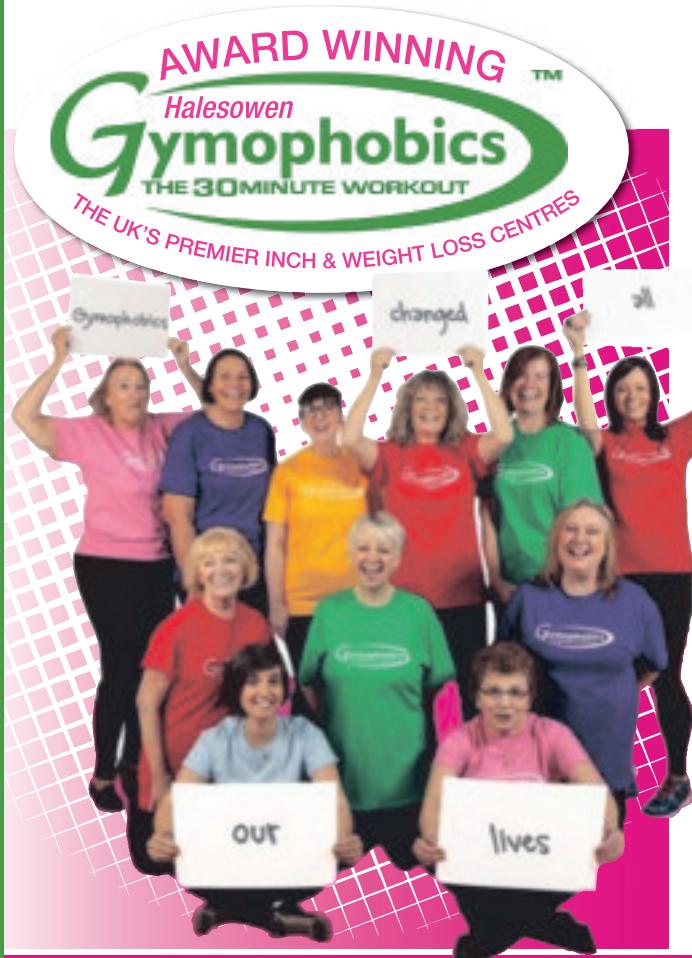
A. A 30 minute session 3 times a week is all you need to drop a dress size in 10 weeks and with our extended opening hours and appointment system to ensure your time slot, everyone can get the figure that they want with limited time available.

Q. And you can help me with my diet too?

A. Yes, all instructors are nutritionally trained in real food, so making it easy to lose weight without cooking different meals for all of the family.

Q. This all sounds fab, I think my mum should come too!

A. That's great and we have special package rates for family members and as there are no men, makes for a great bit of girly time together too!



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Five tips to help get the best out of small rooms

LOTS of us are living in smaller homes – especially in towns and cities. Here are some ideas for making them work better for you:

1. In small bedrooms, storage is all-important.

Fitted wardrobes provide floor-to-ceiling storage and are most useful if built in what might otherwise be wasted space, such as the alcoves next to a chimney breast.

Fitted wardrobes aren't expensive if you make them out of MDF (or get a carpenter to), and can be customised for your storage needs.

A bed with built-in storage may also be a good investment.

2. To make a small bathroom work well, think about re-jigging the layout.

Would there be more space with a corner toilet, shower cubicle or basin, for example?

Also consider the depth of the toilet – some are a lot shorter than others, giving you more useable floor space.

If you don't use the bath, could you save space by replacing it with a shower cubicle?

This may put off some buyers when you come to sell, but may be worth it if it improves the bathroom for you.

If you want to keep the bath, there may be a better bath for the room, such as a shorter, narrower or tapered one.

3. Fitting everything in a small kitchen can be a challenge.

Consider moving the washing machine to the bathroom or under-stairs cupboard, for example, and fitting smaller appliances, such as a two-burner hob.

Clever kitchen designs make more of limited space – try a pullout worktop and wall-hung table that folds down.

Tall wall units, if the ceiling's high enough, give you more storage by using otherwise wasted space.

4. A small boiler will free up space.

Dated properties often have a big, floor-standing boiler with a hot-water cylinder, plus tanks in the loft.

In smaller properties, this takes up valuable space and is unnecessary because a combi boiler, no cylinder or tank needed – will suffice.

Ask a heating engineer if in doubt.

Some combis are especially compact.

5. In some rooms, it's hard to find wall space for a radiator without putting furniture in front of it, which is pointless.

Solve the problem with slimline vertical radiators – they're ideal when wall space is limited and are handy for drying big things like sheets.

Most vertical radiators are only one or two columns deep, which limits the heat output from them.

As well as being a practical solution for small rooms, these radiators are the perfect combination of period elegance and contemporary style, and a nice feature in their own right.

PRODUCTS OF THE WEEK

Create the bathroom of your dreams with Bathstore's Transition range, its first fully coordinated collection.

The star of the show is the Transition Touchstone bath (£2,299, www.bathstore.com).

This curvaceous and sculptural freestanding bath, made of thermally efficient Touchstone, is sure to make your friends and family envious.

If you don't have room, the Transition range also includes basins, taps, toilets, storage and more, boasting some elegant and unusual designs, so you can mix and match.

HOW-TO TIP

If you're drilling into tiles, you'll need a special tile specific drill bit – it looks like a spear and is available from tile and DIY shops.

Put a piece of masking tape over where you want to drill to stop the bit from slipping.

Report by Gabrielle Fagan

OPTING to work from home may seem an easy way to slip away from the time-wasting and stress of commuting, office politics and irritating bosses – but to be successful, it's essential you do your homework first.

That work space can be anything, from a designated room to a small corner on a landing, or even a garden shed.

Whatever your base, it will need to be well-equipped and functional to ensure you're able to be productive, organised and efficient – but also stylishly designed and comfortable, so you enjoy the experience when you join the estimated four million people who've already made home their work base.

"The average person requires a lot of discipline and motivation to successfully work from home, often because of the lack of separation from the distractions of home," says Emma Brindley, group interior design manager at Redrow Homes. "But when the balance is right, the results can be profound. There's less stress, no difficult colleagues to contend with, and you can tailor your environment to perfectly fit your needs."

"You should aim for a setting which inspires you, appeals to your taste and, if necessary, is also suitable for hosting meetings," she adds.

"Often we find these areas may be multipurpose and used as a library or study for children in the family, somewhere to deal with household admin, or a place to enjoy a hobby."

Follow our guide to three winning styles for home offices:

SERENE STUDY

Your work space can be a haven of calm if you choose a soft pastel colour scheme and avoid clutter.

"It can be difficult disciplining yourself if you're working from home, as there are often so many distractions around you."

"The right decor's key when creating a motivational environment, and a simple colour scheme with pastel shades can really make a difference," says David Roebuck, managing director at online blinds retailer, Direct Blinds.

"Use a window blind which tones with the rest of the colours used for the walls or furniture, and add a rug in complementing shades."

"That will give the space an identity and you can conjure an informal style enlivened by colourful touches, which will be a brilliant contrast to the grey uniformity of a standard office."

TOP: If your desk is in a living area, it can be hard to distance yourself from work at the end of the day – consider disguising it with a folding screen.

WORK WISE: A dining table which doubles as a workstation is a good choice if you're space-starved. Furniture Choice's Vila White Gloss Table, £369.99 (available in March); could be paired with its white Leon Leather Dining Chair, £39.99.

George Home's Sadie Dining Table with four chairs, £249, comes in three shades: pink, grey and duck egg (available from February 20). Its grey wooden Wyatt Dining Chairs, £130 each, would also look good.

Express your personality with accessories: A wall-mounted white Cloud Storage Pot, £11.90, Red Candy; a bright pink Leitmotiv Z Lamp, £29, Furnish, and for clock-watchers, a Hometime Light Pink Wall Clock, £19, JD Williams.

STREAMLINE STYLE

A monochrome scheme, a compact desk and slim storage will integrate easily into an open-plan living area.

"We've noticed a rising trend on Houzz for flexible work stations in kitchens, living rooms and even hallways," says Victoria Harrison, editor of online home design destination, Houzz.co.uk.

"The kitchen's undoubtedly one of the most popular areas to site a home office, as our research found around a third of homeowners used that area, while seven per cent were specifically renovating that area so they incorporate a work or study space into it."

TIP: Transform a wall with chalkboard paint, which will not only "zone" the office area but help you stay organised if you use it to display lists, plans, notes and dates. Colours Black Matt Chalkboard Paint, £11.73 for a litre, B&Q; or Rust-Oleum Black Chalkboard Paint, £11.99 for 750ml, was, from £82 a square metre.



Traditional take – Edward Weathered Oak Desk With Cupboard, £2,495, from OKA



Streamline style – black and white stripe Roman blind, from £123



Rust-Oleum black chalkboard paint, available from Homebase

life balance, the office is starting to become a staple part of our personal space," says Brindley.

"A substantial office at the back of the home, hidden from the hustle and bustle, is fast becoming an essential feature in our show homes."

"It's about making it as inspirational as possible, and in a style which suits your taste and needs."

"If you're creative, you'll probably want to display work, so consider cork boards and chalk boards and frame in copper for a contemporary effect."

"A bookcase filling an entire wall is a classic addition to an office, whether you opt for a traditional dark oak, a more modern pale wood open shelf feel or luxurious gold finish."

"Wire baskets and weathered wooden crates will conjure an on-trend industrial look."

TIP: Personalise a space with a small wall gallery of family and friends, or consider a shelf for personal momentos.

WORK WISE: Even the most awkward spaces, such as under the stairs or roof eves, can be utilised as a bespoke fitted work space.

Neville Johnson are specialists, and a polished and painted wood Watts Barn Home Office starts from £3,000.

A desk to impress is essential if clients visit, and a classic partner's desk, an Edward Weathered Oak Desk, £2,495, OKA, could be a good choice. #

OKA also has excellent desk accessories, including a Rattan A4 Paper & Letter Tray, £38, a Blaine Knee-hole Desk in rustic pine, £59, Alexander & Pearl, is equally handsome.

Old school Hanson leather desk accessories, including a Pen Pot, £17, and Storage Box, £33, Neptune, would add an air of a



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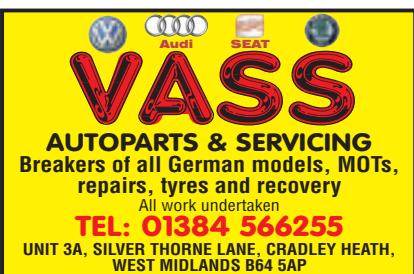


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Interior of a nice loft, a wide empty room with plenty of light from skylights

Make sure your top is in good condition

IT'S easy to overlook your home's roof, but it's important to keep it in good condition, especially at this time of year. Take a look at these suggestions to keep your roof tip top.

1. Roofs should ideally be inspected twice a year (or more), both from the outside (with binoculars) and inside the loft. If you can see daylight in the loft, there may be something missing on the outside.

Roof tiles or slates that have broken, slipped or been blown off are a common occurrence. If they're not replaced, rainwater will get into the loft and cause damage there, and then in the rooms below.

Other parts of the roof can cause leaks and damp, too, including the flashing, guttering and chimneys. You may be able to spot these problems yourself, but will usually need a roofer to put them right.

2. If the roof has to be retiled, do you replace the tiles like for like or go for something different, provided there are no planning restrictions?

"Although handmade tiles look great, they can make the job more time consuming – you may need an experienced roofing team to manage the materials," says Simon Braithwaite, category manager at builders merchant Travis Perkins.

"Handmade tiles are also expensive. Expect to pay around £1,000 per 1,000 tiles – the average detached house requires 8,000 tiles. Another consideration is the area – if you live in a rustic village, handmade tiles may be much more in keeping with your surroundings."

3. "Handcrafted tiles, which are tiles that have been dealt with by hand during part of the production process, usually cost much less than handmade ones," says Braithwaite. "If you have a smaller budget, machine-made clay or concrete tiles are the most affordable options. Concrete tiles can degrade in appearance and structure over time, whereas clay lasts much longer and is more aesthetically pleasing."

He continues: "Another consideration is the roof pitch – you can't use certain types of tile on certain roof pitches because they don't look good and could cause structural problems."

4. If you're overhauling a roof, think about fitting skylights (again as long as there are no planning restrictions). Skylights (also called roof windows) come in all shapes and sizes and can make a big difference to the amount of light entering the room below. If you're doing major building work, such as an extension or loft conversion, skylights are a great

addition, but they can also transform existing rooms with little or no natural light.

While fitting a skylight is usually a job for a roofer or builder, experienced DIYers can fit them.

You may think that skylights are expensive, but they don't have to be – the Tyrem range at Screwfix starts at £161.22 for a 550mm x 780mm double-glazed skylight.

These skylights are straightforward to fit, have a handle instead of a bar, which can make opening and closing them easier, and come with a 10-year manufacturer's guarantee – just remember to get the correct flashing kit for the type of roof covering.

5. Flat roofs can be prone to leaks, not least because they should have a gradient, but the gradient often isn't steep enough.

If the roof is too flat or doesn't have an adequate structure or materials under the roof covering, it will sag, allowing rainwater to pool and eventually enter the room below.

The roof covering can also get damaged. If you're building a single-storey extension, putting a flat roof on it will enable you to easily access the house above (to repair the guttering on the main roof, for example), but a pitched roof should be more reliable long term and is more aesthetically pleasing inside and out.

It's time to declutter now that spring is on its way

By Sam Wylie-Harris

THINK spring cleaning's not really your thing? Here we show some simple steps to make light work of those dreaded chores and spruce up rooms in the process...

No wonder we all get a bit over-excited when thoughts turn to springtime.

The days are getting lighter, we're all feeling a bit more social, planning holidays, freshening up our wardrobes and, erm, getting stuck in with the Big Spring Clean?!

If the mere mention makes you shudder, don't despair – it's not all about putting on a pair of Marigolds and having to sacrifice a precious weekend to play Mrs Mop.

Making time for a good clean sweep doesn't just mean your home can be given a once-over. A decent tidy up and sort out can be good for the heart and soul too, and help keep that spring in your step when you come home at the end of a long(er) day.

Plus, it's a good excuse to have a little revamp at the same time: Reward yourself with some new accessories and little touches, to add to the freshened-up feel and make the hard work worthwhile.

Here's how to spruce up the home, ditch the dust and style up your space if it's looking a little tired around the edges, without getting too frazzled in the process...

CLEAR THE CLUTTER

Think practically when it comes to having a serious spring sort out. Take the opportunity to rethink your storage solutions and invest in baskets, crates and boxes which have a long shelf-life, will hold all the items you want to hide away, and look smart or stylish too.

Knagglig Pine boxes, from £5, dark grey Klamtare Boxes With Lid, £6, Fargrik White/Stoneware, £13.50 (18-piece service), Muskot Plant Pot, £2, Ikea (www.ikea.com).

POT IT

Topiary adds life and colour to a space. Dressing up a sparkling clean window with some flower pots is an easy way to achieve this. Any greenery will look fresh, and you can always find a sunny spot for an indoor herb garden. Double Flowerpot, £4, Flying Tiger stores nationwide (uk.flyingtiger.com).

SCENT SURROUND

Candlelight gives off a warm, flattering glow that makes both you and your dining room look better, and with The White Company's Spring fragrance range, a scented bouquet is only a flicker away. Spring Signature Candle Collection, from £20, The White Company (www.thewhitecompany.com).

CLEAN BY DESIGN

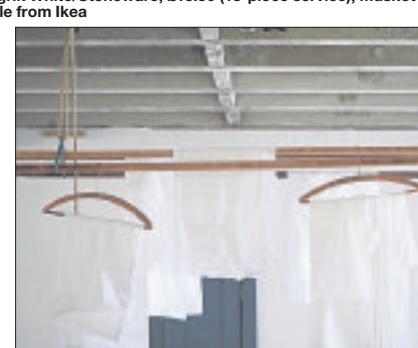
Is there anything that can make housework a little more inspiring? Colouring book artist Johanna Basford has teamed up with planet-friendly cleaning product brand Method, creating a series of illustrations for a limited-edition range featuring a beautiful Hummingbird Garden design. Method Johanna Basford Multi-Surface Cleaner,



Knagglig Pine Boxes, £5, Klamtare Dark Grey Boxes with lid, £6, Fargrik White/Stoneware, £13.50 (18-piece service), Muskot Plant Pot, £2, all available from Ikea



Chichester Base Cupboards, from £560, Somerton Rectangular Basket, from £49, available from Neptune.com



Linen Ruffles Bedlinen, from £115 (double), Limited Edition 900TC Square Pillowcase, currently £52.50 from £75 (Pair), rest of linen from Soak & Sleep



John Lewis Croft Collection Blakeney Double Towel Cabinet, £275, Oval Wire Basket, £25, Knitted Basket, Grey, £22 and Willow Laundry Basket, £30



Miele Complete C3 Silence EcoLine Vacuum Cleaner, £260, available from Miele.co.uk

of having to keep all your bits and bobs in the larder or under the sink. To make your space work harder, group products together and make the most of wall space with storage hooks. John Lewis Croft Collection Blakeney Double Towel Cabinet, £275, Oval Wire Basket, £14, Grey Knitted Basket £22, Oval Willow Laundry Basket, £25, John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com).

CUPBOARD LOVE

Sometimes, the best way to make a clean break is to invest in some new kitchen cabinetry. If your kitchen's due an upgrade, but the budget doesn't stretch to redoing the whole room, introducing a few new pieces could be just the ticket. Chichester Base Cupboards, from £560, Somerton Rectangular Basket, £49 (small), from a selection at Neptune (www.neptune.com).

LAUNDRY DAYS

Even the smallest utility room can be a space-saver, and free you from the confines

of having to keep all your bits and bobs in the larder or under the sink. To make your space work harder, group products together and make the most of wall space with storage hooks. John Lewis Croft Collection Blakeney Double Towel Cabinet, £275, Oval Wire Basket, £14, Grey Knitted Basket £22, Oval Willow Laundry Basket, £25, John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com).

CARPET BAG

Let's face it, nobody likes the sound of a noisy vacuum cleaner (especially pets and young children), and so it's worth investing in a quieter model, such as a Miele Complete C3 Silence EcoLine Vacuum Cleaner, £260 (www.miele.co.uk), which boasts an innovative reduced-noise motor and integrated sound insulation. The Dynamic Drive swivel casters, with rubberised wheels and shock absorbers, also protect floors.

Divorce? We are here to help you get through it

Commercial feature

HERE at Talbots Law we aim to clarify the Divorce and Separation process for you. We do not underestimate how unsettling and stressful separation can be to all parties involved.

Each case is unique to the parties involved and their particular circumstances. There are often 101 questions our clients wish to know the answers to and we aim to answer as many as we can in a straightforward and clear way. Some we are often asked are along the following lines:

1. Is there such thing as a quickie divorce? On average, a divorce will take about six months. If both parties are co-operating, it could be four or five months. However there are lots of other things that need to be considered like sorting out finances, sale of the house perhaps, pensions and of course, children.

2. Is there such a thing as a common-law man and wife? The answer to that is no. Separation of couples who are not married has to be looked at in a different way as the courts do not have the power to deal with people's finances or their relationship in the same way as if they were married. We do have considerable experience in dealing with people who are separating, even when they are not married.



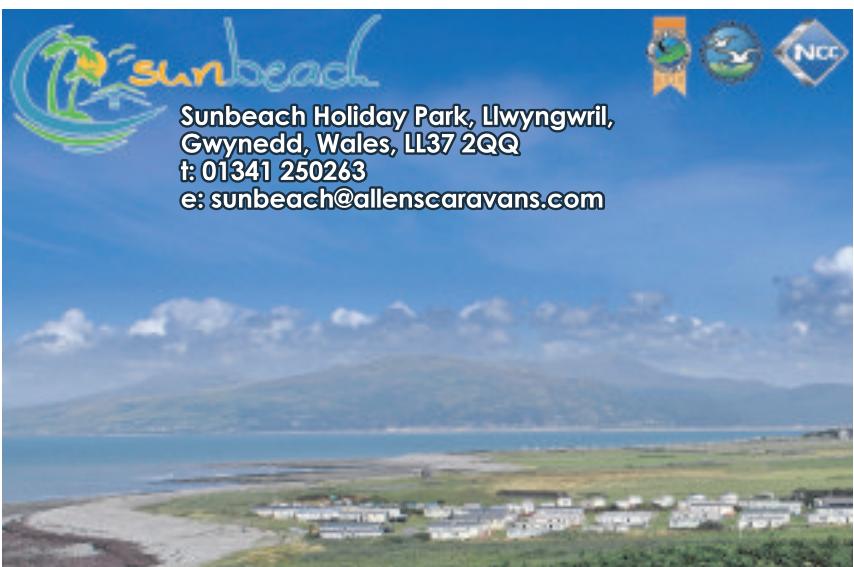
James Wright – here to help

3. Are Pre Nuptial Agreements binding? In happy or uncertain times people often forget to think about what might happen if things do not go according to plan in their new relationship. There is not a specific law that says such agreements are binding. The courts are tending to uphold more of these that have been entered into before a marriage, but there is a long list of requirements that needs to have been met for the court to say that the agreement is binding. Two of those requirements are that there has been full financial disclosure by both parties and also that both parties have had their own legal advice.
4. What about our children? When separating, it is often upsetting for parents to have to consider what happens to their children. It is always hoped that the parents can decide

what is in the best interests of their children between themselves. If they can't, the court will help them out and, if necessary, intervene. There are certain things that are helpful to know in these circumstances. It is always thought best for children to continue to have a relationship with both parents unless there is a certain reason as to why not. If there cannot be an agreement between the two parties, the court will make a final decision in the best interests of the children.

5. Are there other ways of resolving your case apart from court? Yes there is. This is known as mediation. If the circumstances are right in your case, then it may be possible to meet with a mediator to discuss not only arrangements for your children, but also financial arrangements following separation. Mediation can be more cost effective in the long run and it tries to encourage parties to sort out their own situation amicably.

We have only given you a snapshot of the things that need to be discussed with a lawyer. We understand that your case is individual to your particular circumstances and your family's needs and it is only when we talk in detail about your circumstances, that we can provide you detailed and tailored advice with options for you to consider. To speak to one of our Family team about these issues or any other you may be considering, please call 0800 118 1500 today or visit our website at www.talbotslaw.co.uk for more information.



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In search of the 260 musketeers in Norway

ONE of the oldest mammals to stomp our planet, musk oxen are a triumph of nature. Sarah Marshall visits Norway's Dovrefjell National Park, where the hardy Arctic animals have become an unusual tourist attraction

IMPLAUSIBLE as it may seem, it is possible to overheat in temperatures of minus 10C.

I discover this while heating up a steep-sided valley in Norway's Dovrefjell National Park, smashing my racket-shaped snowshoes against the indomitable terrain as if I'm serving an ace.

Peeling away sodden layers of merino wool like shells of an onion, globules of sweat drip from my brow and freeze.

I'd guug from my water bottle if it wasn't an ice-lolly; eating snow is the only thirst-quenching option.

We've been trekking for three hours, spiralling through brittle, life-drained forests and over smooth, snow-blanketed granite mounds, in search of the park's enigmatic but dangerously volatile resident – musk ox.

Roughly 260 of these ancient Arctic mammals graze here year-round, sweeping the mountains with a scraggy mass of unkempt hair and mopping up lichen, moss and grass in the process.

Contemporaries of the woolly mammoth, their resilience is remarkable; occupying this planet three times as long as Homo sapiens, they've weathered ice ages, human hunting and disease.

But this Norwegian community is much younger.

In the 1920s, musk ox bones were discovered during the railroad construction in nearby town Oppdal, suggesting conditions would be favourable for their reintroduction.

Ten animals were shipped from Greenland in the 1930s, although most were shot and eaten during the Second World War. Allegedly, one was even presented to Hitler as a trophy.

A second group successfully settled between 1947 and 1953, and were largely ignored by science.

Twenty years ago, Johan Schonheyder from Musk Ox Safari began guiding tourists to see the Bovidae beasts (who are actually closer relatives to sheep than cows).

Most people come in summer, when clement weather makes hikes much easier and females come down to the river Driva to give birth, but winter visits are on the rise.

The chance to see living remnants of prehistory against a backdrop of pastel-daubed Nordic skies is too good a photographic opportunity to miss.

A day earlier, I'd arrived in Trondheim, the entry point to Norway's central Trondelag region, and the country's former Viking capital.

Colourful clapperboard stilt houses draw visitors to 18th century wharves on the river Nidelva, a short walk from Nidaros Cathedral, built on the burial site of national hero St Olav.

Trondelag is also Norway's wild region, where hunters have thrived for centuries and untamed animals continue to prosper, and a two-hour drive along the E6 soon leads me to Oppdal.

By the time we find our quarry – a herd of 27 animals with a six-month-old calf – it's already late and buttercup streams of sunlight are stretching out our shadows. Horns flicking upwards like sinister pigtails, one incredible hulk bears his side profile in a defensive stance. Being mowed down by something the size and speed of a snowmobile is enough to send me recoiling from our 80 metre "safe" distance.

Knowing we have a second stab at finding them the following day, we ride home on fading rays of daylight.

There's news a group of musk oxen have been spotted closer to the road, and with a dog, Tell, to drag our belongings in a pulk (sled) the hike promises to be less arduous.

After just one hour, we find four males bunched defensively in a bachelor group. This particular population is protected within the park boundaries, but once numbers swell and they stray outside, shooting is deemed a necessity. Last year, 10 ended up on the table as sausages.

When the wind picks up, we take our cue to leave. But the musk oxen are going nowhere. Brute strength is enough to surpass this storm.

They are, after all, one of our planet's true survivors.



Top-end accommodation at Le Domaine de la Dragonnière



Stunning rock formations at Grotte de Clamouse



The aqua park at Domaine de la Dragonnière

Beauty of Languedoc is well worth visiting

SITUATED on the Mediterranean coast, sandwiched in between Provence and the Spanish border, the Languedoc region has long been a favourite tourist destination among the French.

Its charms are being appreciated more and more by us Brits, attracted by the great weather and centuries of culture and tradition.

Admittedly the increasing number of cheap flights available to the centrally located Béziers Cap d'Agde Airport also add to the allure.

When I arrived there for a half-term family break the temperature was still in the early 20s, and the fact that October is very much the off-season for Languedoc made it the perfect time to explore the region away from the madding crowds of summer.

Our base was Sunélie's vast Le Domaine de la Dragonnière, a campsite located a stone's throw from the airport that is more of a fully functioning village, complete with shops, bars, various eateries and dozens of activities, including swimming, cycling, football and dancing.

Our luxurious cabin was surrounded by palm trees and featured all mod cons. There's even an outdoor barbecue, although it was the good old fashioned hammock in the spacious front garden that proved particularly popular with the kids.

It would be quite easy to while away the hours within the confines of the site, especially given the excellent swimming pools and water slides, but there is far too much to do and see in Languedoc for that to be an option.

The pretty commune of Portiragnes is well worth a visit. The town itself features a couple of decent restaurants, one of which served us up a magnificent cassoulet, the delicious slow cooked meat stew that is a speciality of the region.

Béziers itself has grown into a bustling town surrounded by shopping malls and industrial sites, but many of its surrounding villages represent some of the region's

HOLIDAYS

Report by Peter Madeley

finest spots. Pézenas is stunning, featuring more than 30 protected "historical monuments" including the romanesque Church of Saint-Jean-de-Bébian, and the beautifully restored theatre, which contains souvenirs of the esteemed playwright and actor Molière.

The spectacular walled town of Carcassonne, around an hour's drive from Béziers, is well worth a visit.

Europe's oldest fortified town – deservedly classed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site – takes the breath away on the approach along the winding main road.

No trip to the region would be complete without a visit to one of the hundreds of vineyards. It produces a third of the total wine production in France, and boasts some of the country's finest vintages.

They have made wine at Château Sainte-Eulalie for more than 100 years, but the estate has only really gained its reputation for excellence since Isabelle Coustal and her husband Laurent took over in 1996.

Sitting just outside the tiny village of La Livinière, the site contains 34 hectares of vines and produces six high quality wines, including four reds, white and a rosé. Most of the picking is done by machine, before the grapes are sorted by hand and put through the fermentation process in either concrete tanks or oak barrels.

Sadly the treading of the grapes is now a ritual consigned to the past but it is still fascinating to see the grapes' journey from yard to bottle.

Mme Coustal is an excellent host, and it is not long before we are ensconced at the cellar doors sampling the winery's sumptuous wares.

Another experience for the must-do list is to visit one of the region's many caves. Grotte de Clamouse, situated off the D4 around 10 miles north west of Clermont l'Hérault, is a huge network of jaw-droppingly spectacular caves.



The stunning medieval walled city of Carcassonne is one hour's drive from Béziers

Beaches and so much more to see in Queensland



Blue waves rolling on Surfers Paradise beach

KAREN BOWERMAN visits the Gold Coast, where the Commonwealth Games will be held in 2018

IT'S November, and in the searing heat of Australia's Gold Coast, I'm attending the unveiling of the 2018 Commonwealth Games baton.

Taking place in a hotel auditorium in Broadbeach, a small district just south of Surfers Paradise, up on stage, local kids in fluorescent hot pants perform high kicks and back flips, as a giant, bright blue koala – the mascot of the Games – dances among them. This month, the baton begins its journey from Buckingham Palace through the nations and ter-

ritories of the Commonwealth. It'll carry a message from the Queen, inscribed on paper made from Australian spinifex grass. Some 288 days and 230,000km later, it'll be back on the Gold Coast for the start of the 2018 Games.

The baton is a sleek, narrow loop, made from the region's native macadamia wood found on its mountains, and reclaimed plastic gathered from its shores. There's a strip of reflective stainless steel, said to evoke the coast's iconic skyscrapers, and flashing LED lights, to symbolise the energy (certainly evident in all those high kicks) of the people who call the region home.

The Gold Coast is made up of 57km of surf-soaked beaches, 66km south of Brisbane in Queensland, eastern Australia.

Each morning, I sit on my balcony and watch the Pacific Ocean pound the shore. But while the coast is known for surfing, there are plenty of other ways to enjoy the water, too.

Some 10 kilometres north of Broadbeach is The Broadwater, an area of ocean protected by islands, where Steve from Australian Kayak Adventures runs paddling tours.

Beyond the shore is what locals call "the green behind the gold" – the region's hinterland, defined by the Scenic Rim, an area surrounded by volcanic mountains.

From just outside Canungra, a rural township 25km inland from Surfers Paradise, I take in the forests and farmland from the sky in a hot air balloon.

The Ticket



**COMEBACK KID
JAMES IS ON
THE ROAD AGAIN**

INSIDE

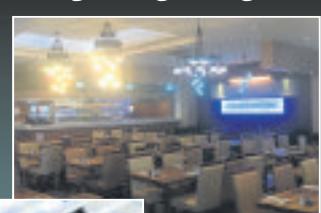
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The Ticket

Filling an arena...? It's not Impossible

He's the first to admit he could have ended up on the 'scrapheap' for good, but James Arthur is reclaiming his dreams. The singer talks to The Ticket about growing up, and why arena tours and a self-help book are up next.

The night before the Brits last month, James tweeted that if anyone had told him a year ago he'd be up for two awards, his response would have been, 'F**k off'.

And who could blame him? His tumultuous period after winning The X Factor back in 2012 was well-documented.

He rowed with fellow musicians online, offended the LGBT community and got dropped by Syco, Simon Cowell's record label.

It all read like a tale of self-destruction, rather than one of music success.

But now the Middlesbrough-born 29-year-old is back – and as far as surprise turnarounds go, he's crafted a career-revival that bows down only to Craig David's. He'll bring his solo tour to plays Birmingham's O2 Academy on Friday, March 24, and is on the line-up for V Festival in Weston Park in August.

James may not have taken any gongs home from the Brits but says it was an 'honour' to be nominated. Before that, his sophomore album, *Back From The Edge* – released in October, shot to number one in the charts, as did lead single *Say You Won't Let Go*; he's back on the books at Syco, and has just started on a UK tour that runs throughout March.

MELTDOWN

"It's mind-blowing," he mutters softly, rolling his rings around his fingers as he speaks.

"At the Brits two years ago, Jimmy Carr got up and made some crack about me having a meltdown, and I remember watching it, thinking, 'I am a joke in this country, there's no coming back from this'.

"Not only was I an X Factor winner that got dropped by Syco, and when that happens you're never heard of again, but everyone thought I was a clown. I was in those 'where are they now' articles and I was like, 'F**k me, I'm that guy, I'm on the scrapheap'."

James credits his escape from the overcrowded pop scrapheap to a spirit forged through his unbalanced upbringing.

"I remember when my parents put me up for foster care and no one gave a f*** about me. I've been a survivor for so many years, I've always felt like I've been trying to survive and always found a way to climb out of the s***. That's just been a theme of my life, it's the mentality I've had to get out of the mire."

Opening up about that journey – from living in a bedsit, to winning The X Factor, and then watching it all crumble down around him – he says it left him feeling 40 or 50 years old.

"It's like I've been around for a long time, and to some people it might seem a bit bizarre me saying, 'I'm back from the edge', but it is wild when you think about it."

He says the comeback was fuelled by his on/off girlfriend, professional dancer Jessica Grist.

"I pushed everyone away, I ignored everyone. It was just me and Jess, who was so supportive and helped me through a million panic attacks and a million calling ambulances."

James has suffered from 'crippling' panic attacks since first

Back from the brink – James's new tour sold out in 10 minutes



appearing on X Factor, and reveals he has plans to pen an autobiography that will also serve as a self-help book for fans who endure similar issues.

Music's helped him cope with his anxiety, he says, and he wants to use his public platform to inspire others who feel overwhelmed.

"I'm really passionate about it and I really care," James explains. "My message to those that do have it [anxiety] is, I know regular things can be so difficult – going to the shop, just going outside – but I'm doing it. And I'm having to go out and be judged by it and by the world. So if I can travel to France and play a gig in a train station with thousands of people around, then you can get up and go to the shop, buy a pint of milk and you will survive, you'll be all right."

As for returning to Syco – the label reportedly wanted him back after Simon Cowell listened to James's second record – the singer says he initially wanted to reject their offer, but relented because he's a 'sucker for a story'.

"When they asked me to come back, I thought, 'Well I'm number one on iTunes already, so f*** you', but I'm a massive fan of fairy tales and underdog stories. I'm the

I pushed everyone away, I ignored everyone. It was just me and Jess

one person in history that they came back to, I like that that will be written, it's a bit of an ego thing.

"I felt like I had to prove myself to them, to let them know how good I am, how mature I've become and how much I've grown up."

For James, that sense of maturity means having more diplomacy when dealing with the label's A&R – those responsible for looking after musicians and their output.

"I'd never experienced A&R before and it p***ed me off. I hated A&R. I was like, 'Don't tell me how to make music, I've just won The X Factor, have a bit of faith in me – I'm James Arthur, I'm the best thing that's ever come from this show. I'm gonna make you a lot of money,'" he admits.

"But that's not how it works. If you're signed to a major label, you have an A&R, they do have to give opinions and if I was left to structure songs, we'd have eight-minute, obscure left-of-centre tracks."

He's pleased that *Back From The Edge*'s success means he can now perform some different songs live. No doubt his fans felt the same; James's UK tour sold out in just over 10 minutes.

"We could've done arenas this time," he says, "but I'm happy because I love to do those packed out rooms."

If his current winning streak continues, he'll be playing those arena tours in no time...

● James plays O2 Academy Birmingham on Friday.

● For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.

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On tour – New Model Army



Rock stalwarts spring back after release of album Winter

STALWARTS of the alternative rock scene for more than 35 years, New Model Army are back with a tour that brings them to Bilston's Robin 2 venue on Saturday.

The tour comes after releasing latest album Winter with customary contrariness at the height of last summer.

Formed by Justin Sullivan in Bradford in 1980, New Model Army's beginnings were inspired by punk rock and the incendiary atmosphere of the times.

Since then, they have had a long, creative and eventful journey. They have been massively influential in post-punk, folk-rock, political-rock, goth, metal and all kinds of

musical sub-cultures but have steadfastly refused to belong to any club that would have them as members.

NMA have built up an almost religious devotion amongst fans. Having grasped early on that the Internet was going to revolutionise the music industry, from the mid-1990s they set out on the now fashionable wholly independent path of controlling all aspects of their output. As a result, they have outlasted most of their peers.

Winter was released on the band's own Attack label. This album saw New Model Army receive the best critical response of their career and top 30 chart positions in UK and Germany.

The album is a powerful and emotionally

intense body of work. Says founder, lead singer and main songwriter Justin Sullivan: "I think Winter has a really strong identity. It is very much the sound of people in difficult places, something that so many of us can relate to at the moment, on a lot of different levels. We made a deliberate choice in mixing it to sound more aggressive and a little less polished."

Originally formed as a three piece, the current five piece features Michael Dean on drums, Dean White on keyboards and guitar, Marshall Gill on guitar and Ceri Monger on bass.

Tickets for New Model Army, supported by Under A Banner, at the Robin 2 cost £20 in advance or £22 on the door.

I'm just a normal bloke – Mouth of the South

AFTER a sell-out autumn tour, the star of BBC TV's Live At The Apollo, Mock The Week and Channel 4's 8 Out Of 10 Cats, Rob Beckett is back on the road touring the UK.

The 31-year-old comic from South London, nicknamed 'the Mouth of the South' due to his toothy grin, is one of the most popular comedians in the country, quick-witted with a matey likability.

"I just try and be a normal bloke," observes Rob, who is the popular host of the Absolute Radio show, Rock'n'Roll Football.

"At the end of the day, we're just chatting on stage. I'm genuinely grateful that people come to see me. If it wasn't for the audience, I wouldn't have a jet-wash, I'd just have an ordinary hose!"

"I've done hundreds of low-paid jobs in

my time. I used to work in a flower market carrying around bags of compost. So the fact that I can now put my face on a poster and people will turn up for the show makes me so pleased."

The comedian, who between 2012 and 2014 co-presented ITV2 spin-off show I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here! NOW!, says his rapport with audiences stems from his natural curiosity.

"I'm just nosy! I love talking to the audience and getting them involved. I really like hearing their stories."

Another element that keeps his Mouth of the South show fresh is the fact that Rob's material is constantly evolving.

The stand-up says: "I don't want to be living in fear of altering a routine. I'd rather change it and let it progress. I enjoy that much more. That's how I can do 200 shows on a tour because it's always growing and changing."

If I didn't do that, I'd have gone mad by now."

On tour Rob will be covering such down-to-earth, subjects as holidays, Christmas, cold calls and nights out. His routines are taken from his own life.

"I enjoy making people laugh. I'm as funny as I can be for 90 minutes. I try and take people's minds off things for an hour and a half. If you ever stop enjoying that, that's the moment to give up."

He adds: "Before I did stand-up, I'd always been rubbish at everything. I was doing all sorts of terrible jobs on the minimum wage and living in a grotty flat in Lewisham.

"Then I started doing comedy, and all of a sudden I finally found something I was good at and I'm not letting it go."

Rob comes to Birmingham Town Hall on Saturday (April 8). See www.thsh.co.uk or call 0121 780 3333.

Brothers set to spread some joy at 02 Institute

INFLUENTIAL Scottish rock band The Jesus & Mary Chain, AKA Reid brothers Jim and William (pictured), release Damage and Joy, their first album for 19 years today and play Birmingham 02 Institute on March 31.

The Blossoms had a great 2016, playing Glastonbury, headlining their first UK tour and hitting the no1 spot with their eponymous debut album. See them at Birmingham 02 Academy on Wednesday (March 29).

Let's hope it's T-shirt weather when Liverpool's indie popsters Circa Waves play Brum's 02 Institute on Thursday (March 30), following the release this month of second album Different Creatures.



Acerbic Lee set to provide comedy

AFTER several years of his BBC TV show Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle, Content Provider is acerbic Shropshire-born Lee's first new full-length show since the award-winning Carpet Remnant World. It is being staged at the Symphony Hall, Birmingham, on Monday and Tuesday night. Other comedy highlights are in Wolverhampton with Ignacio Lopez and Simon Emanuel at the Grand Theatre's Encore Lounge tomorrow (Friday); then Harry Hill's sometime assistant and Albert Square resident Charlie Baker at Wolverhampton Slade Rooms on Saturday.



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NATIONAL SPORTS

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Sat 22 Apr	Emmerdale Studio Experience.....	£99
Sat 6 May	The London Motor Show (b&b).....	£99
Sat 13 May	Hobbycrafts, Stitch & Sew - Live!.....	£79
Sat 13 May	Abingdon Airshow & Historic Bahn.....	£99
Sat 27 May	Chelsea Flower Show (b&b).....	£169
Sat 27 May	Truckfest Spectacular & Oxford.....	£99
Sat 10 Jun	Ideal Home Show & Liverpool.....	£79
Sat 24 Jun	Victoria at Harewood House.....	£89
Sat 24 Jun	Harlow Carr Flower Show.....	£99
Sat 24 Jun	Polo Hollywoods Make & Bake Festival.....	£99

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NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

SUNDAY'S TV MARCH 26

CHOICE



Thandie Newton

Line of Duty (BBC1, 9pm)

New series. Thandie Newton stars in the fourth instalment of the crime drama as a detective on the trail of a serial killer. She is determined to catch the culprit as soon as possible and prove her worth to her superiors – but a colleague fears her efforts may have led to a miscarriage of justice, and alerts the AC-12 team to the situation. Jason Watkins, Lee Ingleby, Adrian Dunbar, Vicki McClure, Simon Millar, Elva Trill and Frank Cannon also star.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** The Big Questions. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. **(R) 1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Flog It! **(R) 2.15** Countryfile Spring Diaries. **(R) 3.00** Escape to the Country. **(R) 4.00** Songs of Praise. **4.35** Shop Well for Less? **(R) 5.35** The Best of Red Nose Day. **6.35** BBC News. **6.50** Regional Programme. **7.00** Countryfile. This week's show comes from Denbighshire, where Matt Baker meets one of the country's most successful sheep farmers while Ellie Harrison observes the spring mating rituals of grouse and goes in search of adders on the moorland. Sean Fletcher and the art team make edible flowers. Adam Hart visits a colleague in Cumbria that provides a sheepdog training course, and Tom Heap examines the future of British farming. Including weather for the week ahead. **8.00** Antiques Roadshow. Fiona Bruce presents the show from Burton Constable Hall near Hull, which is home to a collection of treasures. Objects brought in to be valued include a ship's anchor that was found in a garden pond, a medal awarded to sailor for helping to recover Captain Scott's ship from the Antarctic in 1901, some 17th-century flat pack furniture, and a flimsy booklet that proved to be a profitable investment. **9.00** Line of Duty. New series. A detective is determined to bring a serial killer to justice and prove herself to her superiors – but her efforts may have led to a miscarriage of justice. **10.00** BBC News. **10.20** Regional Programme. **10.30** Film: Iron Man 3. (2013) The armoured avenger hunts for the mastermind behind an untraceable series of bombings, despite being cut off from his usual resources and traumatised by a recent brush with death. His search uncovers a secret conspiracy involving a drug that renders the user indestructible. Superhero adventure sequel, starring Robert Downey Jr. **11.30** The Celebrity Apprentice USA. **1.50** Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.55** BBC News.

BBC2

6.45 An Island Parish. **(R) 7.15** Around the World in 80 Gardens. **(R) 8.15** Gardeners' World. **(R) 8.45** Countryfile. **(R) 9.45** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.15** Nigel Slater: Eating Together. **(R) 11.45** The Importance of Being Earnest. **(R) 1.15** FYI: The Importance of Being Earnest. **(R) 2.15** Countryfile Spring Diaries. **(R) 3.00** Escape to the Country. **(R) 4.00** Songs of Praise. **4.35** Shop Well for Less? **(R) 5.35** The Best of Red Nose Day. **6.35** BBC News. **6.50** Regional Programme. **7.00** Countryfile. This week's show comes from Denbighshire, where Matt Baker meets one of the country's most successful sheep farmers while Ellie Harrison observes the spring mating rituals of grouse and goes in search of adders on the moorland. Sean Fletcher and the art team make edible flowers. Adam Hart visits a colleague in Cumbria that provides a sheepdog training course, and Tom Heap examines the future of British farming. Including weather for the week ahead. **8.00** Antiques Roadshow. Fiona Bruce presents the show from Burton Constable Hall near Hull, which is home to a collection of treasures. Objects brought in to be valued include a ship's anchor that was found in a garden pond, a medal awarded to sailor for helping to recover Captain Scott's ship from the Antarctic in 1901, some 17th-century flat pack furniture, and a flimsy booklet that proved to be a profitable investment. **9.00** Line of Duty. New series. A detective is determined to bring a serial killer to justice and prove herself to her superiors – but her efforts may have led to a miscarriage of justice. **10.00** BBC News. **10.20** Regional Programme. **10.30** Film: Iron Man 3. (2013) The armoured avenger hunts for the mastermind behind an untraceable series of bombings, despite being cut off from his usual resources and traumatised by a recent brush with death. His search uncovers a secret conspiracy involving a drug that renders the user indestructible. Superhero adventure sequel, starring Robert Downey Jr. **11.30** The Celebrity Apprentice USA. **1.50** Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.55** BBC News.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Bottom Knocker Street. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. **(R) 6.25** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. **(R) 6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. **(R) 6.45** Sooty. **(R) 6.55** Signed Stories: Share a Story. **(R) 7.00** Curious. **(R) 7.15** FYI: The Mindbenders Are Go. **(R) 7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! 7.35 Scrambled!: Mr Bean: The Animated Series. **(R) 7.50** Scrambled!: Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors. **8.20** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. **(R) 8.45** Scrambled!: Teen Titans Go! 9.05 Scrambled!: Adventure Time. **(R) 9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Countrywide: Guide to Britain. **(R) 10.00** Peston on Sunday. **10.55** Wild Australia with Ray Mears. **(R) 11.25** All Star Family Fortunes. **(R) 12.10** ITV News: Weather. **12.15** The Voice UK. **(R) 2.05** Film: Dr No. (1962) James Bond spy thriller, starring Sean Connery. **4.15** ITV News: Weather. **4.25** Live Connery. **5.00** ITV News: Weather. **5.15** Lithuania (Kick-off 5.00pm). **7.30** You've Been Framed! Gold. Harry Hill narrates a comical selection of mishaps filmed by viewers, featuring everything from giddy grandmas, cute kids and crazy animals to below-the-belt mishaps, practical jokers and painful-looking accidents. **8.00** Vera. The detective is drawn into Newcastle's underworld to discover the identity of a murderer victim found dead in the river, with no clue as to who he is apart from a distinctive drags wrapper. She discovers the dead man had ties to some very dangerous people, many of whom may have wanted him dead, while a witness's testimony links the case to a remote farm where a murder took place 13 years previously. The connection brings Kenny's past back to haunt him, as he was responsible for seeing the perpetrator convicted. **10.00** ITV News: Weather. **10.15** World Cup Qualifier Highlights. England v Lithuania. Action from the Group F clash between the countries at Wembley Stadium, where the teams played each other for the first time in this campaign. **11.30** The Nightly Show Best Bits. **12.00** Premiership Rugby Union. Action from the 18th round of fixtures. **12.55** Jackpot247. Interactive gaming. **3.00** The Cube. **(R) 3.50** ITV Nightscreen. Text-based information service. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. Guests air their differences. **(R)** **5.15** Kirstie's Vintage Gems. **(R) 5.05** Fifteen to One. **(R)** **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. **(R)**

CHANNEL 4

6.00 Kirstie's Vintage Gems. **(R) 6.15** The King of Queens. **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. **(R) 8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. **(R) 8.30** Frasier. **(R) 9.00** Fred's World. **(R) 9.30** The Simpsons. **(R) 1.00** The Simpsons. **(R) 2.00** Formula 1 Australia Grand Prix Highlights. **4.40** The Restoration Man. **(R) 5.45** Location, Location, Location. **(R)** **6.40** Channel 4 News. **7.00** Our Guy in China. Guy Martin explores Beijing, uncovering the tourist traps and follows his own passions as he reveals a lesser-known side of China. He meets families who live on a scrapyard and earn their living by processing old cars and spends an afternoon helping out by operating the cranes and machinery, before visiting the hub of the market for rare and exotic supercar sales and assists in the building of what will be the tallest building in Beijing, the China Zun skyscraper. **8.00** Rivers with Jeremy Paxman. The presenter travels along the Thames from its source in Gloucestershire to the Kent and Essex marshes, and delves into its history as a working river going back to the time of the Domesday Book. He meets people who maintain the banks and bridges, and bridges, and work to manage flooding and deal with sewage. Last in the series. **9.00** Hornet. Katie catches a break, underlines a plan and Max goes undercover. Drama, starring Claire Danes, Rupert Friend and Elizabeth Marvel. **10.05** Gogglebox. Instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. **(R)** **11.00** Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown. With Claudia Winkleman, Johnny Vegas, Reginald D Hunter and Sara Pascoe. Last in the series. **(R)** **12.00** Film: Grease 2. (1982) Musical sequel, starring Michelle Pfeiffer. **2.00** UK's Best Place to Live. Sarah Beeny reveals the United Kingdom's most desirable place to live. **(R) 2.55** Great British Buildings: Restoration of the Year. Kevin McCloud and Anna Keay visit buildings up for the Restoration of the Year award. **(R) 3.50** Building the Dream. **4.45** Kirstie's Vintage Gems. **(R) 5.05** Fifteen to One. **(R)** **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. **(R)**

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. **6.05** Peppa Pig. **(R) 6.10** Milkshake! Bop Box. **(R) 6.20** Paw Patrol. **(R) 6.30** Bob the Builder. **(R) 6.45** Fireman Sam. **(R) 6.55** Rupert Bear. **(R) 7.00** The Little Prince. **(R) 7.15** Wanda and Wilf. **(R) 7.25** Angelina Ballerina. **(R) 7.35** Little Prince. **8.00** Formula 1 Australia Grand Prix. **8.20** The Restoration Man. **8.30** Noddy. **8.40** Toyland. **8.50** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. **(R) 9.00** Shimmer and Shine. **(R) 9.25** Peppa Pig. **9.40** Peppa Pig. **(R) 9.50** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. **(R) 10.00** Digby Dragon. **(R) 10.10** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. **10.45** Film: The Princess Bride. (1987) Comic fantasy adventure, starring Cary Elwes. **12.35** Film: The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Musical fantasy, starring Judy Garland. **2.35** Film: The Parent Trap. (1998) Comedy remake, starring Lindsay Lohan. **5.00** Film: Dirty Dancing. (1987) Romantic drama, with Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey. **6.55** 5 News Weekend. **7.00** Film: Michael Jackson's This Is It. (2009) Documentary following rehearsals for the singer's planned 50-night series of concerts at London's O2, immediately before his untimely death in 2009. Featuring interviews with Jackson, including Billy Jean and Wanna Be Startin' Something, and an insight into the elaborate preparations for the shows that were never staged. **9.00** Michael Jackson: Man in the Mirror. Profile of the singer, following his development from child star to rock icon. **10.45** Film: Rising Damp Forever. **11.10** Film: Rising Damp (1980). **12.10** FYI Daily. **12.15** Film: Rising Damp (1980). **1.10** Inspector Morse. **3.00** May the Best House Win. **4.40** On the Buses. **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen. **E4** **12.00** The Goldbergs. **3.00** The Big Bang Theory. **6.30** Film: Iron Man 2 (2010). **9.00** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD. **10.00** Film: The Adjustment Bureau (2011). **12.05** Tattoo Fixers. **1.05** The Goldbergs. **1.40** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD. **2.35** Gap Year. **3.20** Melissa & Joey. **Film4** **1.00** Rango (2011). **3.05** Sherlock Holmes: Terror by Night (1946). **4.20** Inkheart (2008). **6.25** The Way Back (2010). **9.00** Ted (2012). **11.05** The Stag (2013). **12.55** Crazy Heart (2009).

DIGITAL

BBC Four **7.00** Revolution and Romance: Musical Masters of the 19th Century. **8.00** Stunning Soloists at the BBC. **9.00** 6 Music 2017 Festival Highlights. **10.30** The Secret Life of Bob Monkhouse. **12.00** Timewatch: The Last Days of World War One. **1.00** Tank Men. **1.30** The Century That Wrote Itself. **2.30** How to Get Ahead: At Renaissance Court. **3.30** Live at the Royal Court.

ITV2 **2.00** 2Awesome: 2Awesome: Third Wheel. **2.30** 2Awesome: 2Awesome: LA Story 2. **4.45** Art & Deco's Saturday Night Takeaway. **4.15** Film: Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore (2010). **5.15** FYI Daily. **5.20** Film: Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore (2010). **6.00** Catchphrase. **7.00** Mother's Day Special. **7.00** Film: Coyote Ugly (2000). **9.00** Ibiza Weekender. **10.00** Family Guy. **11.30** American Dad! **12.30** The Cleveland Show. **1.25** The Vampire Diaries. **ITV3**

11.50 Sherlock Holmes: The Hound of the Baskervilles. **2.10** Film: Anne of Green Gables (2015). **3.55** Agatha Christie's Marple. **5.00** Midsummer Murders. **6.00** Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs. **9.00** It'll Be Alright on the Night. **10.00** Rising Damp Forever. **11.25** Film: Rising Damp (1980). **12.10** FYI Daily. **12.15** Film: Rising Damp (1980). **1.10** Inspector Morse. **3.00** May the Best House Win. **4.40** On the Buses. **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen.

ITV4 **1.40** Film: Bend of the River. **19.52** FYI Daily. **2.45** Film: Bend of the River (1952). **3.30** Film: The Horse Soldiers (1959). **4.30** FYI Daily. **4.35** Film: The Horse Soldiers (1959). **5.55** Fishing Impossible. **7.00** The Big Fish Off 8.00. **8.00** Premiership Rugby Union. **9.00** Film: Ransom (1996). **10.05** FYI Daily. **10.10** Film: Ransom (1996). **11.25** Film: Fire Down Below (1997). **12.25** FYI Daily. **1.35** Goodwood Members Meeting. **2.30** Hogan's Heroes. **2.55** ITV4 Nightscreen.

E4 **12.00** The Goldbergs. **3.00** The Big Bang Theory. **6.30** Film: Iron Man 2 (2010). **9.00** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD. **10.00** Film: The Adjustment Bureau (2011). **12.05** Tattoo Fixers. **1.05** The Goldbergs. **1.40** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD. **2.35** Gap Year. **3.20** Melissa & Joey. **Film4** **1.00** Rango (2011). **3.05** Sherlock Holmes: Terror by Night (1946). **4.20** Inkheart (2008). **6.25** The Way Back (2010). **9.00** Ted (2012). **11.05** The Stag (2013). **12.55** Crazy Heart (2009).

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Dirty Dancing, Thursday, Channel 5, 10pm

THURSDAY
Dirty Dancing, Channel 5, 10pm
A dance instructor at a 1960s resort hotel fears his career will be jeopardised when his regular partner is forced to pull out of an important show in which they are due to perform. Luckily, a naive teenager is happy to step in, and is treated to a whirlwind holiday education in life, love and expressing herself. Romantic drama, starring Patrick Swayze. (1987)

FRIDAY
Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides, BBC1, 10.35pm
Captain Jack Sparrow sets sail in search of the legendary fountain of youth. His mission puts him up against a mysterious woman from his past, old enemy Barbossa, now in the employ of the British Navy, and the most feared pirate of them all, the dread Blackbeard. Fantasy adventure sequel, with Johnny Depp and Penelope Cruz. (2011)

Rio gives a revealing insight into his personal life

Rio Ferdinand looked amazed when he sat down to address academics at Oxford Union a couple of years ago.

He'd spent nights worrying about the content of his speech, wondering if he had any common ground with the students. Then he realised they were all people that excelled in their field.

"I always knew from a young age that I wanted to be the best," he told them. So he set his sights on Man United, and wound up fulfilling his goal. Pun intended.

Fear of failure is what drove Rio on. From West Ham he moved to Leeds United "for a small amount of money" and became captain within a couple of months.

By the time he was playing at the World Cup in Japan, it was clear he'd impressed Alex Ferguson, who'd impressed him to take him to Manchester United.

Being an acclaimed footballer was a dream come true for Ferdinand. Little wonder his rags-to-riches story inspired many.

With a successful career and more than a few quid in the bank, he seemed to have it all, including a happy marriage to Rebecca and three kids, Lorenz, Tate, and Tia.

The couple had met while he was playing for West Ham United in the late 1990s. By 2009 they married in the Caribbean, and everything seemed perfect.

Then Rebecca received news that she had cancer; her life expectancy was believed to be between two and five years.

Alas the cancer was a lot more rapid and the family's world was turned upside down in May 2015 when she passed away, aged just 34.

In this moving documentary, Rio meets other families coping with bereavement, and looks at what help is available for parents and children who have experienced loss to move on with their lives.

"I don't think I've grieved properly," he explains. "I've not given myself that time to sit down and really flush everything out and go through it."

Here Rio explores ways of managing grief, including his own, and discovers the only way parents can help their kids move on with their lives is for them to begin to rebuild their own first.

Obviously Ferdinand is not alone; every day in the UK, around 75 men under 50 become widowers. This documentary offers viewers a broader insight into how young husbands and fathers cope with grief as the former soccer star speaks to other bereaved men who share their experiences.

By examining the issues around grief, the stigma men often face in displaying and discussing their emotions, and discovering some of the ways people cope with loss, the film highlights the obstacles bereaved men have to overcome.

"Rio Ferdinand has courageously allowed the cameras to follow him in this revealing and immensely personal documentary exploring the complexities of grief," explains Alison Kirkham, the BBC's Controller of Factual Commissioning and Events.



Rio Ferdinand: Being Mum and Dad, Tuesday, BBC1, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

archipelago, Isabela and Fernandina, home to a diverse wildlife scene.

FRIDAY
Unreported World
Channel 4, 7.30pm

A year has passed since decades of military dictatorship came to an end in Burma, and Aung San Suu Kyi began leading a new era of civilian government in the nation also known as Myanmar. However, the woman once hailed around the world is now being criticised for failing to bring real freedoms to many in the country, and the fighting against various rebel groups has intensified. Krishnan Guru-Murthy and director Karim Shah travel to the country to investigate whether its fledgling democracy can overcome such attacks.

Spectacular Spain with Alex Polizzi
Channel 5, 9pm

New series. The hotelier and presenter shares her passion for Spain's culture and people, and makes some new discoveries along the way. She begins in the north east, a region often overlooked by Brits, where she enjoys a luxurious cabernet grape body scrub, and is shown around an astonishing cellar full of ancient wines. Alex experiences the craziness of the San Fermin fiesta.



MasterChef, Wednesday, BBC1, 8pm

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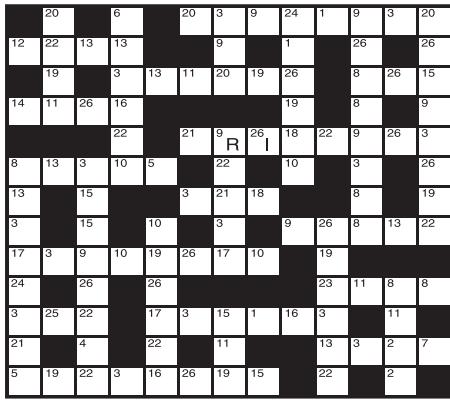


BRAIN GYM

No.422

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	C	T	2	3	W	4	I	5	D	6	M	7	H	8	S	9	K	10	E	11	X	12	O	13	F
14	B	J	15	N	A	16	U	17	P	18	V	19	G	20	Z	21	R	22	L	23	Y	24	Q	25	

Quiz

- From where did Amy Johnson take off on her 1930 solo flight to Australia?
- Who assassinated Jacobin leader Jean-Paul Marat?
- How is the extinct Raphus cucullatus better known?
- To which family of instruments does the cor anglais belong?
- What is the capital of Slovakia?
- What do the letters AD stand for?
- Where does the London Boat Race start?
- What is a quetzal?
- In which gulf is Prince William Sound?
- Who is the muse of dance and choral song?

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

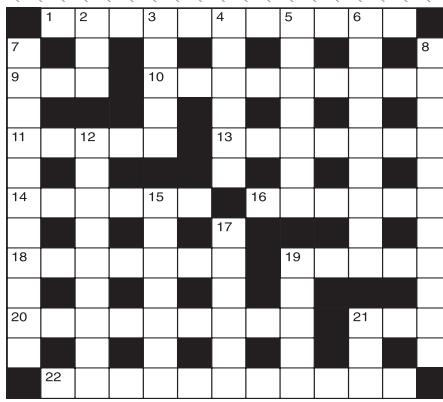
Cryptic Clues:

Across

- Tool for making two propellers (11)
- Frosty feeling - small whisky needed (3)
- Valuer to omit rates, maybe (9)
- Heavenly world tour! (5)
- Race methods used by 17 (7)
- The priests's area is bigger than European capital (6)
- A shelf with right book (6)
- Particular one found in different places (7)
- See 20 Across & 19Ac. In which the last ones are the winners! (9,5)
- Draw a bond (3)
- Suggestion for professional appointment (11)
- What is the capital of Slovakia?
- What do the letters AD stand for?
- Where does the London Boat Race start?
- What is a quetzal?
- In which gulf is Prince William Sound?
- Who is the muse of dance and choral song?

Down

- See 15 Down
- Happening to be unruffled near the tee (5)
- Sentimental old man taking Dorothy a little way (6)
- Large dilapidated mines with me inside (7)
- Sets Regan at variance with friends! (9)
- Need to change navigational instrument inside when surrounded (11)
- Kind of concrete, as emphasised before! (3-8)
- Finish in swapping pub employee (9)
- & 2Dn. The kind of drink one is saddled with? (7-3)
- Quick transport from Naples (6)
- Negotiate to give patient attention (5)
- The end of the implement is missing as well (3)
- Pardon (11)
- Tavern (3)
- Life (9)
- Pale (5)
- Perform (7)
- Outcast (6)
- Bombard (6)
- Aperture (7)
- Disburse (5)
- Worsen (9)
- Racket (3)
- Sincere (4-7)



Quick Clues:

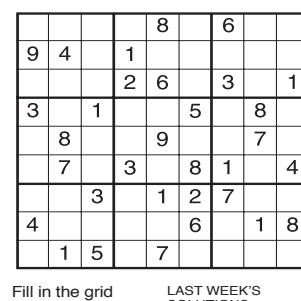
Across

- Possess (3)
- Corn (5)
- Expressed (6)
- Closest (7)
- Incite (9)
- Condemnation (11)
- Free (11)
- Herald (9)
- Excite (7)
- Disfigure (6)
- Perpendicular (5)
- Owing (3)

Down

- Posthumously; 6 Improve; 7 Glad; 8 Standing room; 12 Adherent; 14 Isolate; 16 Carton; 18 Abase; 19 Hind.
- QUICK - Across: 1 Cast; 3 Majestic; 9 Mourner; 10 Sepal; 11 Extravagance; 13 Divide; 15 Filip; 17 Consultation; 20 Phase; 21 Valiant; 22 Creature; 23 Bear. Down: 1 Commands; 2 Spur; 4 Airman; 5 Ecstatically; 6 Typical; 7 Colt; 8 Incandescent; 12 Spinter; 14 Violate; 16 Clever; 18 Irate; 19 Epic.

Sudoku



Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

6	2	7	1	5	9	4	3	8
5	9	3	6	8	4	1	7	2
8	1	4	7	3	2	6	9	5
4	3	5	2	6	7	8	1	9
1	6	8	4	9	3	2	5	7
2	7	9	5	1	8	3	6	4
7	8	6	3	2	5	9	4	1
3	5	2	9	4	6	7	8	6
9	4	1	8	7	6	5	2	3

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Rose; 3 Sampling; 9 Chatter; 10 Sepia; 11 Infant school; 13 Elicit; 15 Impend; 17 Congratulate; 20 Idaho; 21 Tillage; 22 Dreaming; 23 West. Down: 1 Receiver; 2 Staff; 4 Arrest; 5 Posthumously; 6 Improve; 7 Glad; 8 Standing room; 12 Adherent; 14 Isolate; 16 Carton; 18 Abase; 19 Hind. QUICK - Across: 1 Cast; 3 Majestic; 9 Mourner; 10 Sepal; 11 Extravagance; 13 Divide; 15 Filip; 17 Consultation; 20 Phase; 21 Valiant; 22 Creature; 23 Bear. Down: 1 Commands; 2 Spur; 4 Airman; 5 Ecstatically; 6 Typical; 7 Colt; 8 Incandescent; 12 Spinter; 14 Violate; 16 Clever; 18 Irate; 19 Epic.

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

74765423
2165423
84597845423

gives an element,
gives a second element,
gives a third element.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

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Make a night of it

Arthur and out – paint the town red before seeing James sing



James Arthur is playing at the O2 Academy in Birmingham next Friday and it would be impossible not to enjoy a big night out. The Ticket's got the lowdown on where to eat, drink and be merry...

CATCH SOME ZZS



SPLURGE SLUMBER

Go all out and book a room at The Radisson Blu and enjoy sleep time overlooking the city skyline. With its modern and contemporary design it's got serious 'wow' factor for a night away. It's over the road from The O2 Academy on Queensway so within stumbling distance before and after the gig. Rooms cost from £67.50. But you could push the boat out and get a suite with your mates and swan about in bathrobe and slippers while listening to all of James's top tunes from the iPod dock and stereo.

GRUB'S UP



The options are endless when you're in the heart of Brum. We reckon that James would happily head to Chinatown for some authentic cuisine. New Sum Ye in the Arcadian is a great place to try out. The restaurant is all about seasonal food using fresh ingredients full of colour and flavour. Try the crispy duck or the sizzling king prawn. It's a quick and easy pit stop to fuel up ready to dance your socks off and sing your heart out. If you fancy something really cheap, head to Mr Egg which is just the kind of place James would head to before some beers with the boys.

DRINKS ARE IN



It's a student hotspot with a real Indie vibe, so The Sunflower Lounge is the place to go for a few drinks before the gig. There's live music on tap so it's a good way to get you in the mood for the main event at the O2. Enjoy a cheeky drink or two upstairs and if you do fancy listening to some tunes head downstairs. Just round the corner is The Victoria which is a grand old pub with loads of character and a fantastic atmosphere. There are lots of wines, ales and cocktails on tap so it's perfect for getting the evening started in a right royal fashion.

DISCOUNT DEAL

If all you need is a basic bed for the night, spare any expense by sleeping easy at the Hotel ibis budget. It's down the road from the O2 on Great Colmore Street, so you won't even need to get a cab. It offers comfort in simple surrounds with a variety of bed options (twin, double or triple) and there's an unlimited breakfast buffet too. From £35 it's an absolute dream price and you can catch some zzzs knowing you could afford another ticket to see James perform again.

GETTING THERE

TRAVEL TIME

As it's in the heart of the city centre it's easily accessible by car, train or bus. If you do decide to drive in, there are plenty of car parks near to the venue. They range in price from £1 to £5 for two hours. Or you can park further away and walk in. Catching the train is the best option as New Street station is a five to 10-minute walk from the O2 and trains run across the region. Buses into Birmingham come from all areas so if you live close by this could be a good option.

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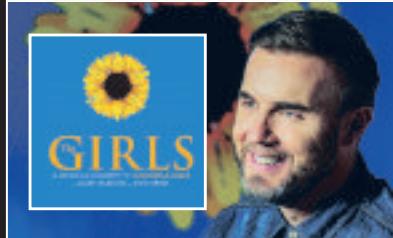
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SsangYong sales drive is moving into second gear



The ELX is the only version with the six-speed auto box

By John Griffiths

SsangYong is another of Korea's car makers which is increasingly making in-roads into the European car market.

It has a long history of making 4x4 vehicles – including Jeeps for the US military in the 1960s – so with the current surge in demand for SUVs the company has never had a better opportunity. It has responded with the launch of the Tivoli (in standard and long wheelbase versions) which is a strong competitor in the compact SUV sector, particularly in terms of value for money.

Now the larger Korando has had a welcome upgrade, and with prices from £16,250 – admittedly for a front wheel drive only model – it's again the value card which makes it worth a serious look.

The biggest change is the adoption of a larger, 2.2 litre turbo diesel across the range with 178bhp. Like its 2.0 litre predecessor, it's a Mercedes unit as are the gearbox choices – six-speed manual or automatic.

All but the two cheapest versions come with four-wheel drive. It's a "torque on demand" system whereby power is diverted to the back if the electronics detect any slippage at the front. It's more common than the



The interior is capable of accommodating five adults traditional transfer box system but actually effective on slippery roads (or off them, come to that).

The official fuel average is 53.3mpg (138g/km) for the two-wheel drive versions, and 48.7mpg (152g/km) for the four-wheel drive model.

The test car was the £22,750 ELX, which is the only version available with the six-speed auto box. Official fuel consumption falls to 41.5mpg (l managed 36) with a CO2 emissions figure of 177g/km.

The autobox is fast and responsive so the Korando has no problem tackling the 0 to 62mph sprint in under 10 seconds. It is equally impressive in terms of in-gear acceleration and on the Korando can be switched from eco to power to winter modes at the touch of a button.

Ride comfort and noise levels are improved on this latest model, too. The suspension is, of necessity for off-road forays, fairly bulky and firm, but those familiar with 4x4s of even a decade ago will be surprised by how well the Korando handles on the road.

While in size terms it's not in the Discovery league, the Korando's size, price tag and equipment levels makes it highly competitive when considered against rival SUVs, particularly when in many cases you have to go for a top of the range version to get four-wheel drive at all.

The interior is roomy and practical, easily capable of accommodating five adults and 480 litres of luggage (that increases to 1,312 litres with the rear seats folded). Roof rails are standard, too.

One of the reasons for the Korando's low price is the fact that it's not one but three vehicles – it also comes as a van and a pick-up. But you can see where other cost-savings have been made in the interior plastics although SsangYong has made an attempt to improve the ambience with the use of different shades and textures.

That's not necessarily a criticism as it has some advantages in addition to keeping prices down. For example, if you want a working vehicle, or if you carry dogs, for example, it's an awful lot easier to keep clean.

Rear parking sensors (a camera on the ELX), tyre pressure monitoring, fog lights, LED running lights, front, side and curtain airbags, electronic stability programme, hill start assist and anti-rollover protection are also standard. All versions have power-operated folding (and heated) mirrors, cruise control and a heated windscreen.

All but the basic models have a seven-inch touch screen controller, with Bluetooth connectivity and satnav, atop the centre console and the audio controls are duplicated as thumb switches on the steering wheel. SsangYong has been attempting to make an impact on UK and European markets since the early 1990s, when it signed up to a technology partnership with Mercedes-Benz. It's fair to say it's been an uphill struggle, but with competent and highly competitive new models like the Tivoli and now the latest Korando, it seems like the company's sales drive is now, at the very least getting into second gear.

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Smart and versatile in all conditions

By Sharon Walters

Just occasionally you may have the need to take your everyday compact executive saloon off well-surfaced roads and on to something a little less smooth. And then there are the times when the well-surfaced roads become a little unfriendly when covered in mud, floodwater, ice or snow.

Which is exactly when you need the security of perhaps the best car to cope with those situations and provide the services you require – the Audi A4 allroad quattro.

A car that's more than smart enough for business, will also do very well carrying the family around and be sure-footed enough to deal with muddy tracks and fields and those slippery winter roads.

And backing up that opinion are the awards for the A4 including 2017 Fleet World Awards for Best Compact Executive and one of the Best Cars in the World for Big Miles from the BBC Top Gear Magazine.

Fleet World judges said the A4 range was a revolution in its segment and while Top Gear drivers may well push cars to extremes they would never see in normal life, they praised the car's polish as well as performance.

And my week behind the wheel certainly fully tested what the allroad can offer.

My test car was the 3.0 TDI tiptronic which starts at £39,645 on-the-road.

Extras added to it took that cost up to just over £56,000 and made it a very luxurious compact. But in all reality half of those extras would have been enough for me and are good value if you can pay the bill.

The engine is smooth and sophisticated and despite its size incurs annual tax of £145, not



The impressive award-winning A4

a lot when you consider the price of the car – that's down to meeting Euro 6 and its 146 CO2 emissions.

And the gearbox and effortless dream.

All that sophistication comes with front and rear suspension set-up that absorbs and controls almost everything thrown at it from potholes to muddy ruts.

Plus you can optimise comfort by adding Adaptive Comfort Suspension with damping control or the Adaptive Sport Suspension which gives even better refinement and even better cornering stability. The allroad has fantastic ride quality and passengers easily fall asleep, as I discovered!

I had the 18 inch alloys which reduce fuel consumption but not a lot compared to the standard 17s and I averaged close to 50mph on combined driving.

It will get from 0-62mph in 5.5 seconds when you need it and had plenty of oomph when



Feeling safe – the Audi A4 allroad quattro is perhaps the best car to adapt to all kinds of road conditions and surfaces

you needed it for overtaking and for pushing through winding country lanes and through the Scottish Highlands.

It has a slightly more rugged look than the standard A4 with plastic body cladding on the wheelarches, sills and roof rails plus metallic skidplates front and rear. And there's a raised ride height which greatly helped me on some

rutted forest roads. Inside it has a quiet and comfy cabin and so much technical gadgetry in the Audi virtual cockpit, it's difficult to get round it all . . . standard kit includes the Audi Smartphone Interface with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto plus my extras included the Bang & Olufsen 3D sound system (£975) which makes my home system sound as

though it comes from the 90s, an advanced parking assistance pack £1,350 and a special technology pack £2,000 adding even more to the standard specification.

One other extra that I really enjoyed was the panoramic sunroof (£1,250) which flooded the cabin with light and made it feel very light and airy.

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Riders line up to say goodbye to the Wolves speedway legend Peter Karlsson, who is seen kneeling, front



A handshake for legend Karlsson from ex-Wolves rider Ricky Wells



Karlsson and Freddie Lindgren on the podium at Monmore



PK on the shale during Sunday's final race meeting

Strong relay squad is Bahamas bound

BLACK COUNTRY athletes Jarryd Dunn and Matthew Hudson-Smith have been selected by Great Britain to take part in the World Relay Championships in the Bahamas next month.

Dunn, aged 25, from Brownhills, and Hudson-Smith, 22, from Lanesfield, Wolverhampton, have both been selected in a full-strength 4x400m squad for the event in Nassau. Theo Campbell, Martyn Rooney, Delano Williams and Rabah Younis make up the 4x400m line-up.

The event, which takes place from April 22-23, is being looked upon as a key part of the build-up to the 2017 World Athletics Championships in London in August.

Performance director for British Athletics Neil Black said: "We are taking these championships incredibly seriously, something we have shown by selecting our best possible teams."

"I am looking for the team to grasp this opportunity and make a big statement of intent in The Bahamas."

He added: "Our primary focus is firmly on the 4x100m and the 4x400m competitions – the events where we intend to be challenging for medals at London 2017."

PK's thanks as bumper turnout bids farewell

A BUMPER crowd flocked to Monmore Green to bid a final farewell to Wolves speedway hero Peter Karlsson.

One of the club's all-time greats, Karlsson first rode for Wolves back in 1990. And the super Swede was given a fitting send-off on Sunday night.

Joined by good friend and current Wolves star Freddie Lindgren to make up the Wolves Legends, the duo – with the help of reserves Kyle Howarth and Max Clegg – came out on top against six other pairings including the Swedish Wolves Jacob Thorsell and Magnus Karlsson.

"It has been a pleasure. It has been fantastic," said Karlsson. "I am thrilled, very pleased the event went as well as it did – everybody who turned up seemed to enjoy it."

"All the riders put on a good show, I saw out a few and gave some of the reserves a go so it was a good night all-round."

Former World Champion Sam Ermolenko was also on hand on the evening which saw an auction take place in the main bar following the races, selling Karlsson kevlar, helmets and team race jackets.

Karlsson added: "It has been a life-changing experience for me here."

Involved

"I came here while I was pretty young and I lived here for a while and learnt so much."

"This club means a lot to me and I would like to thank everybody who came out for the event, I hope they had a good time."

"Wolverhampton, it feels like – and has been – a second home to me."

Legend Karlsson thanked all involved with Wolves speedway for the faith shown in him over the years as he said farewell to the club.

The 47-year-old Swede had his final meeting at Monmore Green on Sunday night in front of a packed crowd.

His feats at the club include helping them to the 2009 Elite League title, despite suffering a broken collarbone two weeks prior to the play-off final.

No baize of glory as Evans loses title bid

DUDLEY snooker ace Reanne Evans saw her bid for a 12th Women's World Snooker Championship ended by her old foe Ng On Yee.

Evans lost at the semi-final stage to the Hong Kong player, describing her 5-4 defeat as 'shocking' on social media.

Evans, aged 31, has won the world title 11 times, including for 10 consecutive years from 2005 until 2014. The 2015 title was claimed by Yee – who had beaten Evans in the last four. But Evans gained revenge in last year's final.

She had cruised through to the semi-finals after defeating Germany's Diana Schuler 4-0 in the last 16 before despatching Thailand's Siriporn Nuanthakhamjan 4-1 in the quarter-finals – the only frame she had dropped up to that point.

In her quarter-final, Yee had struggled past Warathanun Sukritthanan – the conqueror of Netherton's Maria Catalano in the last 16 – to win 4-3. But she edged past Evans in the semi.

After coming unstuck, Evans: "Well that performance was shocking – threw it away #disgusted #itsonlyagame."

SPORTING MEMORIES

By Joe Edwards

"I will really miss it but then again, I would like to think I managed to repay them a bit over the years."

us win the title last year and it's the same with Kyle Howarth.

"It would be great to see the club get back-to-back titles."

Having been such a big part of his life, Karlsson knows he will miss the club dearly but feels he has repaid the support, and now is the time for the young guns to make a real impression.

"I will really miss it but then again, I would like to think I managed to repay them a bit over the years," he added.

"The fans have been fantastic all along – they want to win, just like we do."

"There has been some bad times too, don't get me wrong – injuries and things like that – but you come through them and you win, and that's what we did."

"My message to the fans is thank you for all the support, it means a lot to me."

Fans were keen to thank Karlsson for his spectacular efforts.

Simon Lowbridge, from Coseley, said: "He's been a true great for this club for many years, and for British speedway as a whole. Hopefully there will be many more like him here."

Tony Caldicott – who had travelled from Lakeside to be at the meeting – added: "He's a legend in his own lifetime."

"He is probably the most consistent rider I have seen."

Results:

1 WOLVES LEGENDS 35: Fredrik Lindgren 22, Peter Karlsson 7, Kyle Howarth 6, Max Clegg 0.

2 MONMORE NICE GUYS 31: Niels-Kristian Iversen 21, Adam Skornicki 8, Kyle Howarth 2.

3 BMR ROCKETS 30: Scott Nicholls 15, Chris Harris 15.

4 DANISH PIRATES 29: Hans Andersen 18, Nicolai Kjeldt 11.

5 PK STARS 24: Sam Masters 19, David Howe 5.

6 SWEDISH WOLVES 21: Jacob Thorsell 17, Magnus Karlsson 2, Kyle Howarth 2.

7 US YOUNG GUNS 19: Ricky Wells 19, Broc Nicol 0.

Eggington handed European title shot

STOURBRIDGE boxing star Sam Eggington has been handed a shot at a European title. The 23-year-old welterweight will take on Ceferino Rodriguez for the Spaniard's EBU belt at The Barclaycard Arena on May 13.

Eggington is aiming to continue his ascent in the sport after notching up the most impressive victory of his career earlier this month with an eighth-round stoppage of two-weight world champion Paulie Malignaggi.

Already a mandatory challenger for the EBU belt, Eggington's clash with Ceferino was last week confirmed as chief support for a show topped by Birmingham fighter Kai Yafai's first defence of his WBA super flyweight crown.

Ceferino has suffered just one defeat in a 25-fight professional career and will pose a test for Eggington, who has reeled off three straight wins after losing his British title to Bradley Skeete last March.

"I had to learn a lot after Skeete," said Eggington, who rose through the ranks as an amateur at Warley Boxing Club. "I have real hunger back after losing to Skeete and this is massive for me as I never thought I'd reach this level."

SPORTS DESK 01902 319531

Farewell to a legend –
PK rides off into sunset

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Glassboys up for real ding-dong

CUP giantkillers Stourbridge are targeting another giant-killing act at the Sim-phy health Great Birmingham 10k.

The region's football clubs are limbering up to battle it out for Ding Dong Derby Cup glory over the 6.2-mile route on April 30.

Clubs of all sizes are being invited to enter running teams and compete for silverware.

FA Cup heroes Glassboys are aiming to steal the silverware from the grasp of Birmingham City, who won the inaugural Ding Dong Derby Cup last year.

Any football club can compete by entering a team of between four and eight runners.

The four fastest times posted by each team will be accumulated to determine who is the fittest and fastest club in the region. Stourbridge goalkeeper Matt Gould represented the club at the Ding Dong Derby Cup launch.

The grandson of former Wolves and Albion striker Bobby, and son of Baggies goalkeeping coach Jonathan said: "We like being underdogs and wouldn't it be nice if a non-professional team beat all the big clubs?"

To enter a team, visit the Great Birmingham 10k Business Challenge page at www.greatrun.org/great-birmingham-10k/business-challenge

When filling in the 'name of company' box, type in the club's name followed by 'Ding Dong Derby Cup'.

To enter as an individual go to: www.greatrun.org/great-birmingham-10k

Relay races pivotal as swimmers finish just behind hosts

HALESOWEN swimmers travelled, with vocal support to Redditch for the second round of the Worcester Winter League, and they rallied to take second place.

Early results pointed to a two-horse race between Redditch and Pershore, with Halesowen in third. With four races to go Halesowen were still in third, but then came the final four relays – and two wins and two second places propelled Halesowen just above Pershore and behind the hosts.

Ryan Larkin, 15 and under, won both the 100m breaststroke and butterfly, while Tegan Turley, 11 and under, won the 50m freestyle. Mark Laing, open age group, and Euan Vaughn-Hawkins, 15 and under, both won their 100m backstroke. Emma Osborne and Jack Simpson produced a clean sweep in the open age group 100m freestyle.

The relay teams were superb. In eight races the teams achieved three wins, four second places and a third.

Final scores were Redditch 183, Halesowen 166, Pershore 163, Orion 134, Haden Hill 106 and Stourbridge B 78.

Beaumont's on the crest of a wave



Beaumont, left, and Tom Darling

HALESOWEN'S world champion sailor Crispin Beaumont capped a phenomenal year by being named a 2017 RYA Regional Youth Champion.

The Bartley Sailing Club talent was recognised by the sport's national governing body as one of 10 of the UK's most promising young sailors and windsurfers following an 18 months in which he and partner, Tom Darling, collected a hat-trick of world and European medals in the 29er Youth class.

The annual RYA Youth Champions were revealed at the RYA Suzuki Dinghy Show at Alexandra Palace.

As well as Beaumont being named the Midlands Youth Champion, Darling picked up the Southern region accolade. The pair clinched gold in the final race at 2016 Youth Sailing World Championships in Auckland, New Zealand in December. In July, they had become the first British boat in eight years to medal at the 29er class worlds,

claiming bronze in Medemblik, the Netherlands. The previous summer they took European silver.

Beaumont, aged 19, who is studying at the University of Southampton, is now looking forward to starting his senior sailing campaign with Darling in the 470 Olympic class.

Beaumont said: "I'm looking forward to the future now. Tom and I don't really have any goals for this season, we just want to learn how to sail the 470 well."

Dwyer awaits home start for Heathens

CRADLEY launch their home National League campaign with one of their Perry Barr meetings next Wednesday.

The Heathens face King's Lynn in the first of what is expected to be three outings at Birmingham – with the rest at Monmore Green.

It's a throwback to the launch of the new era in 2010 when they shared venues – and this season they have a combination of new and familiar faces.

Tom Perry, Dan Greenwood and Luke Harris all return – but for Connor Dwyer it means a home debut in Heathens colours. "It's a really good opportunity for me to be at Cradley," Dwyer said. "I'm really looking forward to it and I just want to make the most out of the chance.

"It's a good club, and I'm going into this season with the same sort of mindset I've had every year. I'll always try to improve my average and just keep progressing and moving in the right direction. I've done a lot of laps at Wolverhampton, probably more than I did at Coventry last year, so I'm really excited to have that as my home track."

Dwyer linked up with his new teammates for the first time at their season launch night earlier this month and says they are already developing a strong team spirit.

He added: "Everyone gets on really well already. I've known Tom (Perry) and Dan (Greenwood) for a long time and they are two great lads who I'm pleased to be riding with. There is already a good team spirit developing."

Bragoli gives Yeltz breathing space

Frickley 0 Halesowen 1
HALESOWEN secured a massive three points in their quest to avoid being dragged into the bottom three of the EVO-STIK Premier.

The Yeltz were level on points with Frickley at the start of play and Danny Bragoli's header on 66 minutes means they now have some breathing space, having played fewer games than most of their rivals at the bottom. Frickley hit the bar on 56 minutes but Bragoli headed in from a corner 10 minutes later.

Monday's game at Hednesford was called off and will be played on April 5.

Youngsters make impression



The under-16s in action during a 40-17 win over Worcester

HALESOWEN Rugby Club's first team had an unexpected weekend off after being given a bye in the North Mids Cup, meaning they will now be facing old rivals Bourneville in the final.

As a result, the only senior team in action were the seconds, who lost 33-26 at Kidderminster.

Old Hales fielded a side featuring quite a few new faces as some of the colts side made their senior section debuts. In a game defined by some controversial refereeing, Kidderminster dominated the first half scoring three tries.

Old Hales gained more confidence in the second half but were unable to pull the score back in time. The under-16s squad have had a brilliant season and they travelled down the M5 to play Worcester, returning with a 40-17 victory.

A fantastic new clubhouse and facilities greeted the team as they prepared for what was expected to be a tough side to beat. However, an impressive Stour performance showed how much the squad had improved over the season.

Jacob Bannister ran in the first try, Tom King converted. Further tries followed from Jacob Saul, Henry Thomas and Bannister, all converted. Worcester got a try back, but Hales led 28-5 at the interval and a further score came from Saul, converted.

Worcester made it 35-17 before a late Hales try completed the scoring.

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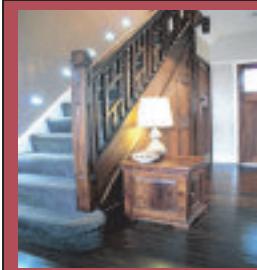


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